

Parnassus

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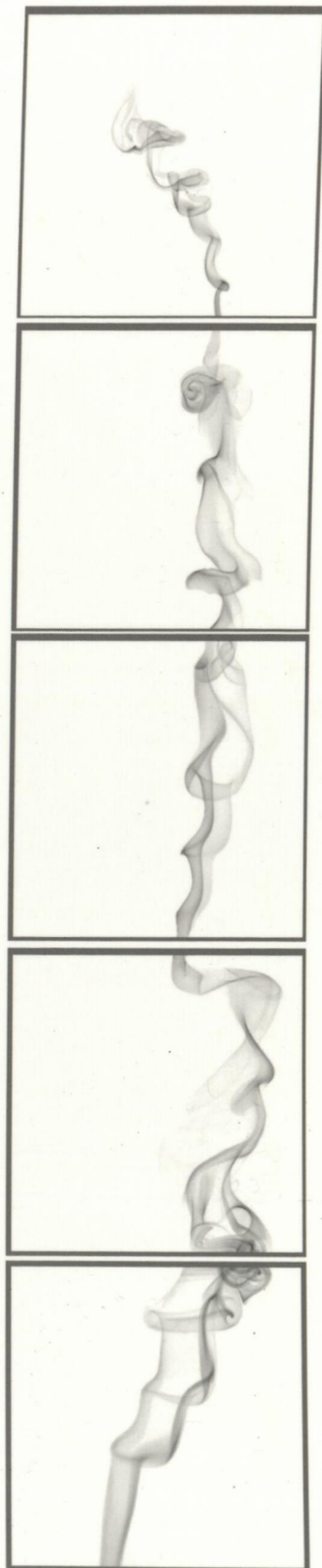
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PARNASSUS

LITERARY & ART JOURNAL 2008
TAYLOR UNIVERSITY



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LITERARY & ART JOURNAL 2008

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The more it tells you, the less you know."
-- Diane Arbus*

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-- Edgar Allan Poe

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"Art is the reasoned derangement of the senses."

-- Kenneth Rexroth

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*"Good writing is true writing."
-- Ernest Hemingway*

PARNASSUS STAFF

Editor	KELSEY WARREN
Editorial Staff	GABE DAVIS MARIKA KOSSIAN BRIAN LAING ANDREW NEEL ALLISON REED JENNY SHAFFER
Faculty Advisor	THOM SATTERLEE

*"We think because we have words, not the other way around."
-- Madeleine L'Engle*

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Part of *Parnassus's* purpose and privilege is to represent various voices in the Taylor community, and part of the pleasure in glancing through its pages is finding these voices in the creative work of different authors and artists-- individuals whom you may never have suspected to see in such a forum, or whose voices you may never have heard before.

Within these pages you'll find pieces by undergraduate students from both the Upland and Ft. Wayne campuses, a candidate in one of Taylor's graduate programs, faculty members from different departments, and alumni living across the globe, from Indianapolis to Boston to the Philippines. You'll also see that a wide variety of majors are represented, including Psychology, Chemistry, Business Management, Developmental Economics, History, Media Communication, and more (in all, 58 authors and artists from 23 different fields are represented). Additionally, you'll find an interview with nationally-acclaimed author Sven Birkerts, paired with a small sampling of his work.

In the effort to offer multiple voices, in this edition you'll also find carefully-selected quotations at the start of each work. A few noteworthy pieces feature a comment from one of our poetry, prose, or art judges; some feature a personal note about the work by its author or artist; others offer a simple quotation that is relevant to the work, mined from sayings and writings from a variety of individuals, from authors and religious leaders to actors, advocates, and more. These quotations aren't intended to guide your interpretation of each work; rather, they are simply reflections on some aspect of it.

As editor, I hope that some of the art and writing you come across speaks to you. Please try to listen. Enjoy this edition of *Parnassus*, as well as the many voices presented within it.

-- KELSEY WARREN
Editor

"It takes a thousand voices to tell a single story."
-- Native American Proverb

Like a Language Lost

There's a spire in the corner of my eye--
I stare ahead, (sometimes behind), finders keepers find.
Peripheries fall, all sorts defined before my time.
As still-born hands move, so do mine.

Idle Passenger
Pays homage to comfort
Point A through point B
Tinted windows shielding light.

Upon arrival, we shake hands.
Man utters words,
Man offers answers.
Nods, confirms.
I ask again about the beauty almost seen.
He turns away, it leaves my mind.

Forgive my intent,
Forgotten potential,
(Like a language lost),
Only knows a fighting few.

To know what I should bury that which I could if I would open my hand....
But my hand is closed from the outside-in and opens with a rare invitation.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I wrote "Like a Language Lost" as a lyrical idea while traveling in Russia during my study-abroad semester in Lithuania. While our group was exploring St. Petersburg I was moved by the intensity of the landscape and architecture, and felt compelled to write about my experience. This is an observation of the often-negative influence that a monetarily-driven society can have on our priorities. More generally, it expresses my understanding of how certain cultural norms can cause us to miss out on things that often deserve far more attention than we permit them.

Cage

How right to call my ribs a cage!
Confined within, there lies a bird
Who trembles when in fright or rage
Whose song is sung, but never heard

Its fluttering I can often feel
When I, impassioned, pause to note
And when my tears I must conceal
The bird leaps up into my throat

If I could but release the thing
It would take wing through sun-streaked skies
Exultant trills and notes would ring
And Heav'n itself would hear its cries

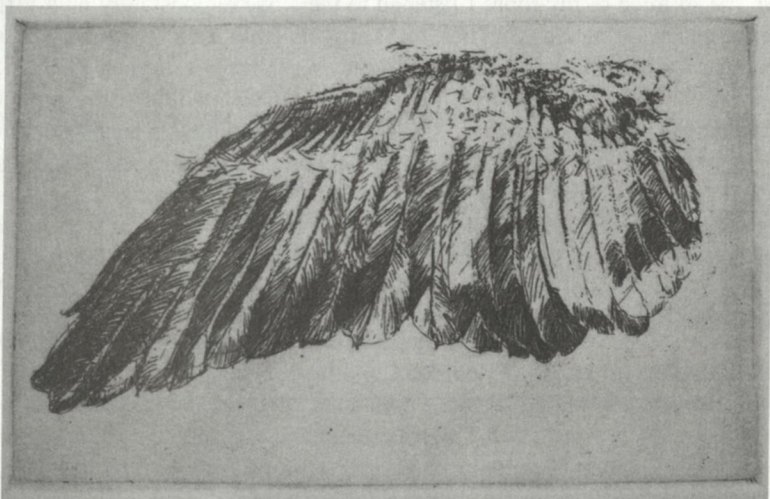
There is no key to spring the lock
And so the bird must wait and age
Until the strong hands of the clock
Release it from this mortal cage

"I see at intervals the glance of a curious sort of bird through the close-set bars of a cage; a vivid, restless, resolute captive is there.

Were it but free, it would soar cloud-high."

-- Charlotte Bronte, Jane Eyre

Wing



"A book is like a man-- clever and dull, brave and cowardly, beautiful and ugly. For every flowering thought there will be a page like a wet and mangy mongrel, and for every looping flight a tap on the wing and a reminder that wax cannot hold the feathers firm too near the sun." -- John Steinbeck

Whale Watching

I had purchased the cassette from a Bass Pro Shop in Missouri. Titled *Pacific Blue*, I concluded it had nothing to do with freshwater fish. I much preferred the ocean. I once had considered becoming a marine biologist; I liked whales. I liked whales especially more than I liked walleye or small mouth bass or carp or catfish or pike. I liked whales more than any of the freshwater fish I watched in the tank at the center of the store.

In the solitude of my room I listened to the cassette constantly on a Fisher-Price tape player of which, being ten years old, I was slightly embarrassed. I pictured a calf alone in the ocean, surrounded by empty shafts of light, crying for her mother. Then I would become the whale, and I would hear myself cry. It would make me think of the time I had lost my own mother in a surplus warehouse. I was completely isolated in an aisle of large cereal boxes, my heart shoved into my elementary throat. I wanted to run and cry and scream, but my mom had always told me to stay put if I was ever lost. So, I walked up and down the ominous strip of concrete, waiting for her to come. I imagined that was what the calf must have been doing, endlessly swimming the same stretch of water, waiting for her mother to return, and there was a lump in her throat that hurt and that made her cry. And the tape became an addiction.

Over a summer vacation between my years of junior high and high school, my family decided to go whale watching while we were camping in Maine. It was seven in the morning, and the boat was like most other tourist boats. It was like the one I had taken to Shell Island and like the one to the Statue of Liberty and like the one to Mackinac Island and like the one to Alcatraz.

The main deck was enclosed and furnished with individual chairs while the top was laden with hard bleacher seats. The bathroom was on the opposite side of the concession bar, which was by the stairs selling overpriced snacks and whale-watching paraphernalia. The stairs posed those soft convex metal diamonds as traction and had railings on either side. It wasn't much to speak of, but I had come to see a whale, not a boat.

We were docked in Bar Harbor. My younger brother and I begged my parents to sit up top in order to have a better view. I was wearing at least three sweatshirts, jeans, and flip-flops. It was miserable weather and ideal conditions for whaling.

"The eye of the understanding is like the eye of the sense; for as you may see great objects through small crannies or holes, so you may see great axioms of nature through small and contemptible instances." --Francis Bacon

Nothing solid was in sight, only miles of dangerous grey in comfortable, uninterrupted waves. I waited in silence, pouring my eyes upon the sea.

Hours later and not so much as a tail, the boat docked.

Carefully we made our way to the center of the lake. We all knew it was solid, at least four or five feet of ice-- it had been well below freezing for months-- but we still moved slowly, if not from fear then from reverence for the phenomenon itself. The lake wasn't large, but, as the sky had melted into the evergreens, that night the lake extended its physical edge.

Afraid the others hadn't realized the unusual expanse of the lake, I sat in a self-serving protest. They followed, one of the girls eventually suggesting we lay in a circle. She was probably thinking it would make a cute picture-- it seemed that the senior girls in high school were always thinking of pictures. Irritated, I thought of an atom, our heads the protons and neutrons, our feet electrons. I wondered if my head would be a proton or a neutron. I would have preferred it be an electron, but electrons can't be in the nucleus of an atom, only protons and neutrons. So I decided I would be a neutron and wondered why I never learned about whales in science class; everyone else did.

The ice contracted, and the cliché of a thousand sensations fell over me. I couldn't help but think the ice had split, even though my mind knew it was just contracting. (I had learned about ice in earth science, atoms in chemistry.)

Convinced the ice wasn't cracking, I couldn't explain my restlessness. I felt disjointed but simultaneously overcome by a deep peace. It was as if I was birthing my own soul there on the ice, forcing myself into existence. I was unsure if other people ever felt this way, their whole lives nothing more than an external fetal stage.

My thoughts were interrupted by a second contraction. This time I heard a whale. Rationality attacked. Such a thing was impossible. It was the ice. I had to agree. It had been the ice. There was not a whale underneath me. But I kept waiting for the ice to break anyway. I kept waiting for the massive body to emerge and then to lure me down with shattered ice. I wondered what it might be like to sink in the ocean. I wondered if you would hear the whales.

I remained motionless; I waited for the ice to fault.

A hyperbolic nausea settled below my stomach, and I stood to walk back. I couldn't take the ice any longer. I heard the whales, and I was listening to my Fisher-Price tape player again, wearing my flip-flops hundreds of miles from the coast of reality. The nausea intensified. I had to get off the ice.

My dad took my brother and me to Atlanta for a long weekend as a sort of impulsive consolation in response to the trip my mom and sister were taking in Europe. The tickets he had bought for the Georgia Aquarium weren't valid until eleven o'clock on a

summer Sunday morning. We were early (as usual when it's only the three of us), so we waited outside for about forty-five minutes in a pseudo-amphitheater. I read *Jane Eyre* while my dad and brother looked through the aquarium brochure they had found on the ground, planning our route of execution in detail several times.

The first exhibit on route, *Georgia Explorer*, displayed the vast array of local aquatic species. Like the fish tank from the Bass Pro Shop, it was overwhelmingly brown and fresh and ugly.

We progressed collectively to the *Cold Water Quest*, where there were sea anemones and kelp and little multi-colored fish and Japanese crabs that "didn't like flash photography." And then we came to a tank of four beluga whales. Four sinuous bodies fluent in the defeated circles of captivity: around and around and then they press against the glass, pause, and around again. While hundreds of people pressed against the glass for a moment with their digital cameras snapping, they were oblivious to their own circling defeat. The whales were watching them.

After the remaining aquarium exhibits, I retreated to the upper viewing deck of the whale tank, hoping for a better opening than I had found earlier. It was still crowded but not like the lower level. I was able to find a hole along the railing. I sat down and followed the tired circles.

I thought of the tape, and I imagined the calf completely isolated by the expanse of the ocean. I imagined she could still remember her mother struggling against the ropes of a tangled net.

With my head against the railing, I watched all the people below me taking pictures for the one-hour-photo. They think belugas are beautiful like I do. But the photos will go into an album and onto a shelf while the calf washes up on the beach where they vacation in the winter. I had once been able to hear her but had sold the Fisher-Price tape player in a garage sale years ago.

Thanksgiving break brought me home from another year at school. There wasn't much to do; I was reading *Frankenstein* and eating in honor of the holiday but had no desire to socially surface. And so I found myself alone in my bedroom, standing in front of the tower of cardboard and plastic boxes filling my closet. I wanted to find the tape.

Aimless, I began in the middle. I found old ballet slippers and softball trophies and ribbons from swimming and academic achievement certificates haphazardly shoved into one of the only labeled boxes. It had been marked 'memory' and contained many things I didn't want but couldn't seem to throw away. I thought the tape might have been inside, but it wasn't.

I continued pulling and searching, thinking I would find it somewhere, I had seen it over the summer, I had saved it, I had put it in one of the boxes, I would find it. My rummaging pace steadily accelerated. Then I realized the closet was empty; all the boxes were already on my bedroom floor. I decided resolutely to look through them again.

Nearly finished, one small, opaque tub was left. I could see several picture frames, colorful candles, and other discarded birthday gifts-- not much else. I looked anyway, and

in the bottom-right corner I found it. Most of the lettering had worn off and its case was missing, but I had found it.

Made in Canada, copyright 1991. I tried to make out some of the silver titles: *White Waters*, *Tender Words*, *Ocean Breeze*, the rest illegible. I had been positive the titles were printed in blue.

I closed the door to my room and crossed to the stereo. It wasn't the Fisher-Price tape player, but it would do just shy of the adequacy of memory. I hesitated before dropping the cassette into its place. I thought of how things had changed and how I hadn't listened to the tape in years. I thought it might be strange to go back, I thought I might be disappointing, but nonetheless pushed the play button and tensed.

There was nothing. No sound, no click indicating the end of the tape. A thrown rush of relief surged through my body. My mind clamored for reasons, excuses. I wondered if the tape was too old, if it had been played too many times. Involuntarily I took it out to see if the other side would play. I flipped the cassette the way a recovered alcoholic reaches into a familiar cabinet, unconsciously compelled to splinter my fragile reality. I was praying the shelves would be empty. I knew it was dangerous to revisit old addictions.

I didn't want the tape to play.

There was silence. Then steel waves swelled on the cold sand of my room, converging with a late 80's electronic lullaby. The synthesizer held each repulsively overindulgent chord a full measure as if to lure the listener into some overtly sympathetic musical tragedy which was then interrupted by an unforeseen guitarist solo, shattering any sounds of nature that had eluded the electric destruction. I stopped the tape and lay prostrate on the carpet until I had re-gathered the remnants of my defeated memory.

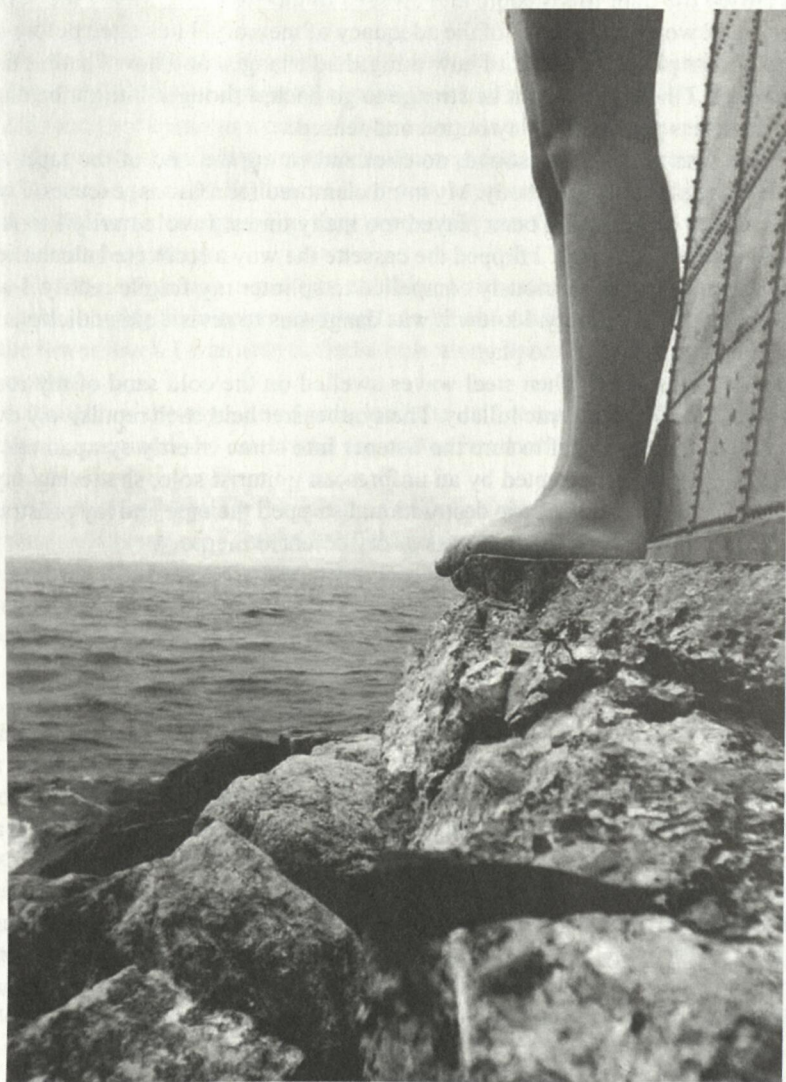
I wasn't sure if crying was the correct response.

It was several weeks before I could listen to the tape again. I had brought it back to school with me, unsure of what else to do with it, almost embarrassed to leave it at home. And then one day, while feeling particularly humble, I thought I would let my roommate listen to the tape for herself-- she had heard enough about it secondhand from me as I tried to make sense of my disillusion.

I dug her stereo out from underneath the bottom bunk behind the suitcases, wiped off an impressive layer of dust, and abandoned the tape inside. I sunk into our couch, clutching the stereo in my lap. Turned at her desk, my roommate tried but could only hold her laughter for a few seconds. I turned the volume down and set the stereo on our make-shift coffee table. I started laughing too. Sitting with her there in our room, it didn't hurt so much.

LAUREN STEIGERWALD

Leaving the Lighthouse



"Lighthouses are more helpful than churches."

-- Benjamin Franklin

ANDREW MARSTON

Portland Headlight



ARTIST'S NOTE: This headlight is about five minutes from my home in Maine. I grew up playing in Fort William's Park, where it is located. For me, Portland Headlight represents more than just the alluring Maine coast. It reminds me of luscious summer days spent with friends and is an icon of my childhood. So many photographs of this lighthouse look similar. I wanted my shot to be as distinctive as my personal connection to the subject.

Mythology

Marina's father was a commercial fisherman in Newport, Rhode Island, and had a passion for all things nautical. He shared this passion with his daughter, not only in naming her after the water that was his livelihood and his joy, but also teaching her as she grew up all he knew about ships and sailors' lore. He told her stories about pirates, sea monsters, adventurers, and castaways. He told her about selkies, too, creatures of Irish myth, seal people who would shed their seal skin and walk about on land as dark, handsome men. Sometimes a human woman would fall in love with a selkie, but before long he would return to the sea, leaving her heartbroken. Partly due to her father's tales, Marina's youthful mind was full of the romance of the past; no matter how many times she heard that her beloved "olden days" were really dirty, dangerous, and oppressive, she still entertained a secret belief in dragons and quests and knights in shining armor. Father and daughter would sometimes sit together, spinning new adventures for an ongoing saga about a ship with billowing sails. He was the captain, her mother was the first mate, and she did the duties of the rest of the crew. Her father had begun the story when she was a child, and it had become a favorite pastime to add to it whenever they had new inspiration.

It was June, and Marina and her father strolled arm-in-arm along Bowen's Wharf, admiring the array of sailing ships moored in the harbor. Ever since she was little, when her father was home in-between fishing trips, he had always taken a day to go on a "date" with her somewhere in or around the city. This summer their times together seemed even more special, since Marina had just graduated from high school and would be going away to college soon. On various occasions they had been to the Newport mansions, hiked the Cliff Walk, and visited museums, but they went most often to the Wharf. She loved to watch the tall ships that came to the harbor for maritime festivals: graceful and elegant beings that seemed to belong on the water. She was disgusted with the noisy, sail-less boats that had gradually replaced them over the last one and a half centuries. As much as she loved her father, she hated the sight of the big trawler that he worked on. Compared with a smart sailing ship like a clipper or a packet, it seemed prosaic, base, and ugly.

As they walked, her father turned to her, mentioning something about a newspaper article he had read the previous day. That was when she saw the *Gypsy Rover*-- a saucy little clipper, with a young man standing on her main deck, straight and proud, wearing a curving, old-fashioned officer's hat and a crisp, dark blue uniform. Marina was near enough to see the handsome face and the intense, solemn eyes. Her grip on her father's arm tightened slightly, and she unconsciously stopped walking. With a glance

"Invent your own mythology or be slave to another man's."

-- William Blake

at her and at the object of her gaze, he chuckled and said, "You see that selkie there?" Marina grinned sheepishly. The joke had distracted her, and when she looked again, she was a bit disappointed to see that the young man had gone from view. She glanced up at her father, saw that he was smiling mischievously at her, and stepped away from him, crossing her arms with feigned indignation. He was handsome, her father; she liked the way his reddish-brown sideburns framed his wind-roughened face and merry eyes.

"Lunch, Marina?" She nodded, smiled, and slipped her arm back through the crook of his elbow as they resumed their walk along the wharf. Marina noticed that her father's jacket was getting worn, and it smelled vaguely of fish. In her mind, she saw the mysterious young officer in his sharp uniform, gazing at her...

They had lunch at Café di Mare, their favorite place to eat on the Wharf. Sitting at their usual outdoor table, they shared a pizza and watched the boats on the water.

"What kind of ice cream today?" Marina's father asked her, as they tried to stifle their laughter at the tourists who were sitting at a table on the other side of the patio, attempting to stop their children from feeding their lunch to the seagulls.

"We can't eat too much," she said. "Mom's making a big dinner tonight."

"We'll walk down the wharf again to work it off."

She grinned. "Double-fudge-chocolate-chunk."

"I thought so."

The tourists left, one of the children screaming nearly as loud as the gulls. They ordered, and the waiter brought the ice cream.

"Hey Dad, this ice cream is the epitome of paradox."

"How so?"

"It's *decadently* heavenly." She made an exaggerated flourish as she brought the spoon to her mouth, casting her eyes up at the green canvas canopy as if praying for absolution for enjoying this sweet sin to the utmost. Then she almost choked. Her father, chuckling himself, thought it was with laughter. But she was looking past him at the young man from the *Gypsy Rover*, who had just sat down a couple of tables away.

"You all right?" her father asked. Marina was careful to nod carelessly. She could feel her face getting flushed and she tried not to look, but she couldn't help it. And then he looked up suddenly; not at her, but she looked down into her ice cream anyway. She heard him order the Italian sandwich and iced tea. Suddenly, it seemed to her the classiest of meals. Her father rose. "I'll be back in a minute," he said, and went into the restaurant. There was now no one else sitting at the outdoor café tables but the young man and herself. Marina's pulse quickened and she absently stirred the melted double-fudge-chocolate-chunk goop at the bottom of her paper dish.

What if he looked at her? If he came over and talked to her? She allowed her mind a moment of wild speculation in accordance with her story-loving heart. What if he asked her to run away with him on his ship? A horrifying thought; but it had an exotic, exhilarating tang. Always she had been what they called a good girl, rarely impulsive or rebellious, and she wondered what it would feel like to break the rules for once. She stopped stirring and stared at the table. The evening his ship was to leave Newport, she would slip out of the house and catch a bus to the wharf. There he would meet her at a certain corner beneath stars and moon and twinkling harbor lights. She would hide in the hold of the *Gypsy Rover*, and every day he would smuggle food down to her. They

would sail south to warm and colorful places, where she would be discovered and put ashore. But he would refuse to leave her, and together they would adventure among lush islands, with the sun to warm them by day; and by night, when their fire had died down, they would have each other... Marina blushed.

Her father returned, and they spent a couple of hours browsing through some of the shops along the wharf. As the afternoon waned, they stood by the pier, watching a tall ship set out on its last voyage for the day, full of tourists who wanted a good, tame adventure. The same wind that filled its billowing sails swept around Marina and caressed her face, lifting her dark, unruly curls from her forehead. The sun was getting its late-afternoon tinge of orange. It would be dark by the time the ship returned; the passengers would ooh and ahh at the bright harbor lights.

Somewhere a street musician was singing a shanty. The concertina that accompanied him was wheezing as if it had had enough of the city and longed for the fresh air of the open sea.

*Bounding billows cease thy motion
Bear me not so swiftly oe'r;
Cease thy roaring, foamy ocean,
I will tempt thy rage no more...*

They began to walk back along the wharf to where they had parked the car, and the flirtatious wind continued to play and swirl around her. The sails of the tourist ship were now aflame with the colors of sunset, and the dusky water bore the earthbound cloud across its surface. The waves lapped the pier behind her.

From the deck of the little clipper, Marina gazed out at the stars and secretly reveled to be so near to the quiet, dark-eyed anachronism who strolled beside her. He was in his uniform, and somehow through him her own story had found its way into the magical realm she had always imagined must exist. She had decided he wasn't aloof or haughty, as she had thought when she first glimpsed him standing on the deck of his ship in his trim officer's uniform; he was only thoughtful and serious. But he could laugh if he wanted to.

They had laughed together the evening they met, a week or so after she had first seen him. Marina had secured a summer job at the smoothie bar on the Wharf, and the first time the young man came in, she had accidentally dropped his smoothie as she handed it to him. She found that he came in nearly every day after he was done with his tours as a reenactor on board the *Gypsy Rover*, that his name was Jack, and that he liked mango-banana smoothies. Sometimes he would stay more than an hour, and they would laugh and talk until she had to close up the store. So it went until summer was waning and the *Gypsy Rover* had to begin her voyage to return to winter moorings. Jack had asked her to come with him. She said yes.

He had met her on the pier as they had arranged, and slipped his strong, warm arm around her waist. He still wore his uniform, and he wrapped his boat cloak around them both as they moved through the shadows toward the dock. Jack wasn't expected to report to his captain till the morning, so when they reached the ship, he smuggled her below where he had stowed some blankets in a cozy corner between some boxes. He lay down beside her, and a faint glimmer of moonlight traced his profile with a fine silver thread.

"Marina." She heard her father's voice in the familiar sound of her name. What would he think of her if he saw her now? "Marina," he murmured again.

"Call me Mary," she whispered. He stroked her cheek.

"Mary. Mary, Mary," he said, with a smile in his voice. The name sounded strange, but she was strange to herself, too. She was suddenly alive; she had dared the unthinkable and become someone else, and no one knew, and such honeyed sweetness was in the secret! She trembled in his arms in the close darkness.

She dreamed one night that she walked the deck of a proud ship in full sail, and the sails were the ghosts of noble giants in the moonlight. The cloudlike silence had the effect of a soft focus lens. She walked with the captain, her arm through his, and she didn't feel the chill of the night. There was no wind, and no waves troubled the water. His eyes were darker than usual; they swallowed the moonlight and were glassy like the calm sea around them. The moon seemed annoyingly bright, and she suddenly wanted to hide from it. The stars blazed unnaturally. She felt cold and noticed that her lover no longer walked beside her. Looking around, she saw a beautiful, dark-eyed seal leap silently from the side of the ship and disappear beneath the still water. The sails became great pale moths, and bore the ship up, up, rocking towards the white, flaming moon, away from the dark, reflective water. She pitched against the bulwark and tumbled over into the darkness so invaded by light that it could hardly have been recognized as darkness...

"Well, Mary, this is Chicago. You like it?" They had been together for a little over a month now, and were standing on Navy Pier, looking out at Lake Michigan, dark under the starless night sky. It was chilly for October. Mary nodded and shivered in the breeze, hugging her fleece sweatshirt to her. The famous skyline glowed around her, and their breath floated away in little wisps of steam.

"Where will we stay?" she asked, looking up into Jack's face. He was staring out at the lights of the boats returning late to harbor. She wished he was still wearing his uniform. If he were in costume, he could wrap her in his boat cloak and nothing would matter; he would find her some warm place to sleep and a hot meal. Officers on tall ships

could do that sort of thing, but she wasn't sure about this young man in jeans and a nylon jacket.

He shrugged. "I know some friends with an apartment not too far away. We can stay there until we find a place."

The apartment was small, dirty, and inhabited by two men in their twenties or thirties and a bleary-eyed woman whose age Mary couldn't tell, but she had to be under forty. The place was yellow with nicotine stains, and bottles and cans lay strewn around the living room. The apartment consisted of a living room, a bedroom, a minimal kitchen, and a bathroom the size of a closet. Jack and Mary were given the pull-out sofa-bed in the living room, because the woman and the older of the two men had the bedroom. The other man slept on a ratty mattress in the hallway.

The first night-- or morning, rather-- after the other three had gone to bed, she whispered to Jack, "Only till we find our own place, right?" She drew nearer to him and tried not to think about when the sheets on the sofa-bed had last been washed.

"Sure, baby." He had drunk more than usual that night, and his breath smelled. She turned her face away. She was so tired. But he wouldn't let her sleep yet. He didn't care about the smoky table lamp that was still on in the corner. He didn't even care about the man snoring in the hallway. "C'm'ere, Mary." Who was this Mary? As she lay there that night, she stared at the light reflecting off the ceiling from the streetlights and the table lamp and tried to distinguish which reflection belonged to which source.

A week went by, during which Jack made vague comments about going out to look for a job and another place to live. He also talked about going back to school to finish his history degree. At the end of the week, the other three having gone out for a night on the town, Mary found herself alone with him in the tiny kitchen. She was trying to coax an omelet out of an egg, some milk, and a few shreds of cheese and tomato. The frying pan was old and the gas stove wouldn't stay at a consistent temperature, so she had to be ever vigilant.

"Have you found a place yet?" She adjusted the flame beneath the pan, then leaned against the counter and looked at him. He shook his head as he filled a chipped glass with tap water. "Jack, don't you realize this place is a dump? Your friends creep me out and I'm scared all the time. Can't we go somewhere else?"

"Look, Mary, I'm working on it."

"What about your old job at the bookstore?"

"Someone else has it."

"Have you contacted your parents yet?" The omelet was sticking too much. She decided to make scrambled eggs instead.

"I will when I feel like it." Jack drained his glass and set it down firmly on the countertop. She had liked the sound of his parents when he had described them to her earlier and wondered why he still hadn't introduced them.

"It seems like they'd help you out, especially if you went back to school. Anyway, I'd like to meet them."

"Yeah." Jack walked into the living room and turned on the TV. Having finished cooking her supper, Mary scraped it into a bowl and curled up next to him on the sofa. They watched a history show together until he fell asleep. Then she got up, turned off the television, and, wrapping herself in a blanket, situated herself on the other end of the sofa.

She had dozed off when their three apartment-mates stumbled in sometime after two in the morning. They were laughing and swearing hoarsely, and she heard the crash of glass before one of them found the light switch. She huddled in her blanket and tried to be invisible. She didn't hear what provoked them, but suddenly the two men were throwing clumsy blows at each other. The younger one backed up and tripped over the coffee table, falling onto her end of the sofa. Her heart pounded. She could smell his dirty clothes, his sweat, and the beer on his breath and shirt. Forgetting his friend, who was laughing at him and leaning on his swaying girlfriend for support, he turned his watery red eyes on Mary and grinned roguishly. He put his arm around her.

"Jack," she cried, trying to push the drunk away. She thought she was going to throw up.

Jack stirred, and seeing the situation, grunted a laugh and nudged his friend with his foot. "Hey idiot, go to bed." The drunk man sniggered and kissed Mary clumsily on the cheek before getting up and staggering into the hallway. The other two made their way to the bedroom. Mary sat disgusted, stunned, and shaking.

"Jack, we can't stay here!" she half-whispered, half-shrieked. Her eyes were wide and frightened, and her tousled hair clung to her face where her tears had wet it.

"Please."

"It wasn't that big of a deal. Don't worry about it." He shifted on the sofa and closed his eyes. "Turn off the light?" She sat still for a moment, gazing at him, then got up and switched off the light.

They had sailed for a month and were approaching a lush tropical island blazing with color where the crew would maroon them both, because Jack had taken her aboard. All the crew had discarded their reenactment costumes and wore modern clothing-- all except for Jack. But he belonged in his uniform like the tall ships belonged at sea. He stood unwaveringly in front of her, shielding her from the jibes of his fellow sailors. She had just been discovered and dragged from her hiding place among the boxes in the hold. But she was not afraid of those sailors who stood around belching smoke like trawlers; she and Jack belonged to another, nobler century, and they couldn't reach them across the span of years. She reached out to touch his shoulder, and he disintegrated like the ashy pages of a burned storybook. Gray ashes blew out to sea, where the dark head of a seal was just visible before slipping beneath the waves.

In the morning, Mary slipped out of the apartment before the others were awake and found a phone booth a few blocks away. With trembling, uncertain fingers, she dialed her house. When she heard it ringing, tears began to sting her eyes.

"Hello?" It was her father's voice. He sounded tired and sad.

"Dad..." She couldn't say any more for a long time.

She stood on Navy Pier, leaning on the railing and staring at the troubled gray water, which reflected the sky. Not many boats were out today. She heard a car door slam behind her, and approaching footsteps. She knew her father's gait, and her hands tightened on the railing.

"Marina?" His voice was gentle, but tinged with concern and urgency, and she felt dirty and ashamed. Slowly, she turned to meet his eyes and found that they were deeply warm and full of love.

The waves lapped the pier behind her. All at once she fell weeping into his strong arms, pressing her face against his rough, worn jacket and breathing deeply its familiar smell.

ANDREW NEEL

Wind Blown



"A man with a grain of faith in God never loses hope, because he ever believes in the ultimate triumph of Truth." -- Mahatma Gandhi

Spoletto Artist



ARTIST'S NOTE: During the spring of 2007 I spent a semester in Orvieto, Italy. I fell in love with the Italian culture while there, from the food to the people to the art. This photo was taken during a trip to Spoleto, a beautiful hill town near Orvieto. Amongst all the shops, I stopped in a gallery, which happened to be the artist's studio space as well. I have always been intrigued by heaps of paint and paint tubes.

Creator

Did your brow sweat
when you built this world
out of thin air and nothingness?

Did your feet stumble
under the crushing weight
of creating beauty?

Did your hands blister and bleed
against the rough
new surface of the universe?

Did you catch your breath
after you exhaled
life into man?

"Work is God's ordinance as truly as prayer."
-- George Dana Boardman

Autumn

Every eye perceives the season of decay
determined not to weep for what is gone.
Every set of lips will separate to say
to all the fields and forests, every one,
“Die quickly now or suffer through the winter soon
to pluck from Earth the lingering scent of life.”
The symbol that the end is near, the harvest moon,
is beckoning the sickle, Autumn’s knife.”
Yet falling leaves reflecting shards of yellow light
Remind me not of dreary death, but life.

JUDGE’S COMMENTS: “Autumn” moves inside a complex of rhymes that punctuate the inevitability of the change of seasons as well as the surprises those changes bring. I particularly like the image of the sickle moon as “Autumn’s knife” and the way the poem turns away from death at the end of the poem and surprises us with the rhyme, “life.”

This is an old subject, but the poem brings something fresh and it challenges the reader with its subtle and supple form.

Spring to Spring

It is in this daylight, flowing
through Florence's cream-carved windows,
curtains shaping shadows on our honeymoon bed,
that I lay staring at eye's overlapping skin,
hoping this will last from spring to spring.

"Spring makes everything young again, save man."
-- Jean Paul Richter

A Winter Fulcrum

The earth west
and the universe east
bracket the dying day,
while winter night-bones grope skyward
after their kin,
thwarted yet under delicate arches,
cirrus-wrought and Helios-gilt.
And I,
I stand at the nadir.
A bridge it would be called
by those who refuse the looking:
rough-hewn pine, pierced and bolted,
then pitch-sealed in memory.
A bridge? Yes...
but a point more so,
on which the earth might be moved
by the turning of leaf or thought.

*"I prefer winter and fall, when you feel the bone structure of the landscape--
the loneliness of it, the dead feeling of winter. Something waits beneath it;
the whole story doesn't show." -- Andrew Wyeth*

Coats

december came
and i grew my hair long
letting my secrets rest,
tangled in it all.
and i watch the snow fall,
forgiving, blanketing
the dead, dirty ground,
and clothing it,
making it all worth
something more.
and in a fit of hope,
i put on a collection of coats
and walked out the door.

"Nature always wears the colors of the spirit."

-- Ralph Waldo Emerson

MARK WILLIAMSON

Over the Tracks



*"A fine artist is one who makes familiar things new
and new things familiar." -- Louis Nizer*

Strung Out

There was nothing new about what was taking place. In fact, we had done this same routine probably thousands of times. We were cruising around town in Tony's car. He had his smoke buzz going. I had a steady pill buzz flowing and a cigarette always burning in my hand. And just like all the times before, she was on my mind.

"So I think I might ask Nicole on a date soon."

"Man, are you really gonna start that talk again?"

"Why do you say that, and why do you say it in that way?"

"It's just been so long."

"Yeah, I guess it has been a pretty long time."

"What, like two years?"

"Three, actually."

"Three years you've been strung out on this girl and you haven't even taken her on a real date."

"I know man, that's why I said I think I'm gonna ask her on a date for this weekend."

"Is she even home from college yet?"

"Um, I think so."

"Well dude, the only thing I'm gonna say is that you've known her for three years now, and you're going off to college in a couple months. This might be the last time you ever have to take her out and find out what could happen. And if you don't ask her on a date then just let that be the end of it. I'm tired of hearing about it."

"Oh come on. I don't believe that everything has to change just because I'm going to college."

"Alright then, wait. See if anything happens," he dared.

That night I thought a lot about what Tony said. Maybe things *will* be different after I leave. I couldn't sleep because of this. I just kept looking at the clock. I saw 2 a.m. pass by like it was nothing. Then 2:30 a.m., still no sleep. Finally, I must have fallen asleep because before I knew it my alarm was ringing, which meant that it was now 4 a.m. and time for me to get up and go to work. I threw on my work clothes, grabbed a cup of coffee to go, and then hit the road. As soon as I got situated in my car I reached for my pack of cigarettes. I clumsily took one out and sparked it up. "There's nothing like that first long drag to start your day off right," I thought to myself. I knew there would be several more smokes before the day was through, but very few of them are as good as the first.

"All good art is an indiscretion."

-- Tennessee Williams

That day at work was exceptionally hard. Not because the work itself was any harder; I made it hard on myself by thinking about that girl. That damn girl. Three years now and I still can't get her out of my mind. And of course there was the sun perpetually beating down on my back. After working a few hours I couldn't take the heat any more.

"I'm taking a break, Dave."

"Is it break time already?"

"I don't care what time it is, I'm getting off this damn roof." Yelling at Dave may have seemed a little unexpected, but with the combination of Nicole on my mind and Dave on my ass, it helped vent some of my pent-up aggression.

Once I got to my car I lit up a square and opened the door all in a single motion. I finished the cig almost immediately and without a thought reached in my glove box and pulled out my stash, popped a few pills and washed them down with some ice cold water. I put my head back, closed my eyes and dreamt of making that phone call. I don't know if it was because of the pills, but I decided that day I was going to call her after work and ask her out for that weekend. Of course, this seemed much easier while I was still at work.

After work I went straight home and took a long, cold shower. The frigid water felt great on my sunburnt neck. My arms stung like hell from all the fiberglass still nestled underneath the skin. "I need to find a new job," I hopelessly thought to myself. After the shower I decided it would be best if I watched some television before calling her. I knew I was only stalling, but I went ahead and let myself do it anyway. While watching T.V., I drifted off to sleep pretty easily. I guess this should have been expected, considering it had been my daily routine for about a month now. When I woke up it was already 5 p.m. Time to make that dreaded phone call.

"Hello?"

"Hey Nicole, what's goin' on?"

"Ryan?"

"Yeah, it's me," I said kind of timidly.

"Hey! Oh my gosh, I haven't talked to you in a while!"

"Yeah, I know. So how are things going?"

"Pretty good. You?"

"Fine," I lied. "So are you dating anyone?"

"No, not really. Why?"

"Well...would you like to go out with me this weekend?"

"Sure. What do you want to do?"

"I was thinking like maybe a movie... and dinner," I said nervously.

"Yeah, that sounds good. Hey wait, is this a date?"

"Um, well why don't we just kind of see how it goes," I said, panicking.

"Okay, that sounds good to me."

"Alright, well how about Saturday at seven o'clock?"

"That works."

"Cool. Well, I'll see you then."

I was so relieved to finally have that over with. I noticed that my hands were still shaking. I went outside and had a smoke to calm myself down.

Saturday night came all too quickly. I had never been one to plan ahead, but it

was now six o'clock and I had no idea what movie I was going to take her to or where we would go out to eat. I hadn't even taken a shower that day. I was a wreck.

"Sarah, will you look at movie listings for me while I take a shower?"

"Why? You got a hot date tonight?"

"Shut up. Just do it, alright?"

"Fine, but you don't have to be so mean."

I rushed upstairs and took a cold shower to try to slow down my nervous perspiration. I suddenly realized that I wasn't sweating due to my nerves, but because I hadn't taken any pills in a few hours. I jumped out of the shower and took three or four of my favorite white pills, then looked in the mirror and tried to convince myself that I wasn't addicted. I tried on one shirt. It looked stupid, so I tried on four more. Then I decided the first shirt looked the best after all. I put it back on and headed downstairs.

"Find anything?"

"Yeah, there's one starting at 7:30."

"Perfect."

Nicole showed up ten minutes late, which didn't surprise me at all. I was instantly hit by the smell of her perfume. It had a sort of sweet lavender smell to it. She had on a black spaghetti-strap shirt and a white skirt. She looked good, real good.

"Your car or mine?" she asked.

"Mine," I said, as if she was crazy.

Once we were in the car I realized that I was still a wreck. The pills were taking full effect, and it's possible they were clouding my judgment at this point. However, if there was one thing I was good at, it was playing it cool. We talked about all the usual things people talk about. How her first year of college was. How my senior year of high school was. She asked me if I still partied and did drugs at all. I lied and said that I hadn't partied or taken any drugs in a while, and that I wasn't really into that any more. I could tell it made her happy to hear that.

"Do you mind if I smoke?" I asked.

"I thought you quit."

"I did," I said impatiently.

"So then why are you still smoking, Ryan?"

"Because I'm addicted," I said sarcastically as I lit up the cigarette.

The movie was alright. I couldn't really focus on it at all. I kept thinking about whether I should make a move and put my arm around her or not. I chickened out and just sat there next to her, my arms folded against my chest. I felt like a loser, but I knew the night was still young. I then looked around and saw all the guys there without girls and it made me feel good to not be one of them.

After the movie I took her to a little Italian restaurant. The food was pretty good. The conversation was alright, lagging sometimes, but not too often. She, however, was impeccable. At one point the light seemed to catch her hair, eyes, and skin at just the right moment, making her hair shine, her eyes sparkle, and her skin glow. All at once, it was like I was eating with some angelic figure. Maybe I was.

The dinner ended in the usual fashion. She offered to pay for her food. I told her to get real and that I was paying for this meal. She insisted on making some sort of contribution to the cause so I told her to leave the tip. Later, just for fun, I grabbed the money

she left, replaced it with my own, and then slipped that money into her purse when she wasn't looking. I did this more for my own entertainment than anything else.

We got back to my place around 11:30 p.m. We were just standing in my front lawn kind of awkwardly, so I told her she could come inside if she wanted to. Thankfully, she wanted to. Inside, I made a bee line straight for my basement. I didn't want her to get caught up talking with my parents. They can really kill the mood sometimes, and I think they know that.

Downstairs, I nervously flipped through the channels on the T.V. Finally, I settled on some show that neither of us really cared for. I decided that enough was enough. I made a move and put my arm around her. I did it in a way so that she could've taken it as a joke or as something serious. She knew I was being serious, but luckily she leaned in and made herself comfortable, resting her head on my shoulder. At this point I was so nervous I didn't know what to do. I just sat there half enjoying the moment and half planning my next move. My heart was racing. I tried several times to make it slow down. I tried relaxing my breathing patterns, but it did no good. My heart continued to pound emphatically. Finally, she looked up at me and told me that she could feel my heart beat through my chest. I decided to play it cool and just smile and say that my heart was racing because of her. Then, without thinking I leaned in and kissed her. After realizing what I had just done I pulled back sort of hesitantly. While I was trying to figure out if I had made the right decision, she looked at me with her big brown eyes and flowing brunette hair, smiled, and then pulled me in for another kiss. I kissed her long and soft, not wanting to make a wrong move to spoil the occasion.

Afterwards, I held her in my arms for quite a long time. For some reason my heart seemed to slow down and I had no need to be nervous any longer.

"So, it looks like this turned into a date after all," I said sheepishly.

"Haha, yeah I think it did, didn't it? So was this your plan all along?" she asked, laughing.

"No way, I just hadn't seen you in so long, and I wanted to take you out for a good time." It was a horrible lie, but she seemed to buy it.

"Well, I'm glad that it did turn into a date. I've always wondered what a date would be like with you," she said.

"Well, now you know," I replied confidently.

We sat and watched television for a couple hours, not realizing how late it was. Finally, she looked at her watch and saw that it was now 1:30 a.m. I tried to convince her to stay longer, but I knew she had to get going. I walked her out to her car and gave her a long kiss goodbye. I stood in the middle of the road and watched until her red tail lights disappeared as she turned the corner. That was the last I ever saw of her.

Bees



"Books are the bees which carry the quickening pollen from one to another mind." -- James Russell Lowell

Grace

May this food,
a fact of seed and dirt and dung,
and maybe something more,

Become a meal--
the grinding and grounding event of teeth and tables,
large intestines and
little chunks of time,

Become a banquet--
a well-wrought, long-remembered mortal thing,
a ritual of human hunger,
a shared ceremony of baking, breaking, and taking;

Become a feast, a fest, a celebration,
a delight-full indulgence in the over-done
and over-determined--

A little giddy,
a little gaudy,
a little godlike,

a lot to ask.

Amen

"More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of."
-- Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Lunch



ARTIST'S NOTE: I was at a butterfly exhibit at the Fort Wayne Botanical Gardens specifically to take pictures of the butterflies. After spending a couple of hours getting your typical close-ups of butterflies with wings spread, I was packing up to go. I saw this butterfly land on a flower in such a way that I could get a picture of its face. As I was composing the picture, I saw that it was happily enjoying the nectar from the flower. I wanted something unique, so I waited until its proboscis was near the pistil and stamen.

Actions



"Words may show a man's wit, but actions his meaning."
-- Benjamin Franklin

The Sound that Silence Made

The silence is loud enough to make me want to scream.

I've tried so hard
to find something to fill this void
that your absence left behind.

But nothing exists.

I used to ask myself
why I hadn't been able to find
even one thing to ease this throbbing emptiness.
Now,
I realize that I only asked
to mask the pitiful truth:
That I've hidden pieces of you inside my aching heart.
And I'm not ready to lose you--
Not yet, Not again.

And anyway,
who am I to say that what I have,
even if it is nothing,
isn't perfect?
To say that this silence is wrong, just because it hurts?
There is beauty in silence.
There is.
It's in the sound of lazy inhales
and slow
drawn out
exhales.
It's in the way that I am reminded of you.

I think you hated silence.
You disturbed it, broke it.

"The cruelest lies are often told in silence."
-- Robert Louis Stevenson

Breathed a little too loudly, too fast.
Allowed the pages of your books to slice
The air and my silent reverie.
Even now,
I expect to hear
That sound, almost like an exhale,
That your sweater use to make
When you moved your arm to turn the pages
Of that book you promised to loan me
When you were done.
But I think you left before you finished...

At first the silence was comfortable.
After all,
It's where I'd always found you;
Making slight noises to let me know
That you hadn't left me.
Not yet.

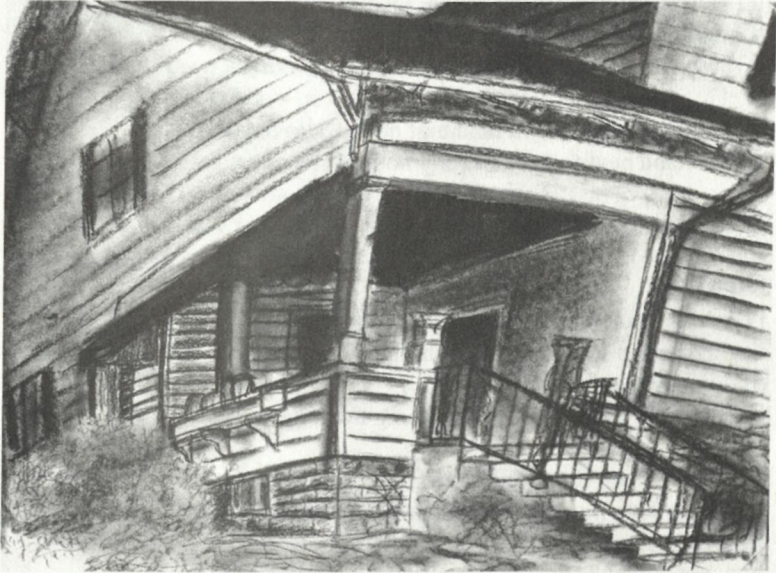
Now I sit and wait for you to breathe behind me;
To sigh or chuckle softly.
To remind me that you haven't left me--
Not yet.

But there is nothing there.
Even the whirl of my laptop has died away.

And the only sound I hear is silence.

It seems so loud,
without you in it.

Aging Stillness



ARTIST'S NOTE: This drawing was done completely in charcoal. The house is located in Fairmount, Indiana, on a street corner. For an inside look, you'll have to ask the Spiegels for a tour. Rumor has it that James Dean used to play in its backyard with his friends as a child.

Elegy

when we were small
we poured Drano on plastic flowers
believing that the chemical was
infused with life
and left by God under our church sink, holy as it was
(all church bathrooms are).
ill-attempted was our chubby-handed nurturing--
daydreams don't turn industrial plastic real.

This spring, you marry a man that does not love you.
I must stand next to you, and say nothing.

The real difference between you
and I
is this:
I can't join you on this Drano-driven quest.
I cannot make something from nothing
(though neither can you).
I see plastic where you see blooming hydrangeas.

I would tell you (but don't) that
no matter how much you make pretend or make love,
how hard you scrub,
how much you wish,
nothing will clean up this mess.

The handy thing about plastic blooms is that they
never die
long after the genuine, soft-petalled, life giving beauties
are trampled under foot.

*"Poetry should... strike the reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts,
and appear almost a remembrance." -- John Keats*

Remember the Days

Do you remember the days
When we were excellent?
When we were challenged to overcome?
To stand tall in a field of chaff
To walk on flaming coals unsinged
To taunt danger on razor edged fortune
When the sun beat upon our faces
When we returned sweated but victorious
When scores of villains fled before us
And we came home for milk and cookies
Once I walked bold towards all unknown
Once I vanquished all my fears
In days when I ran for the wind on my face
In days where I was an invincible hero
And I was safe in a cardboard box

"By recollecting the pleasures I have had formerly, I renew them, I enjoy them a second time, while I laugh at the remembrance of troubles now past, and which I no longer feel." -- Giacomo Casanova

The Good Fight

a full moon rising over twin peaks,
the dawn of a new existence.
a gaping wound sealed
with the satisfaction of asymmetry.

falling down,
we used to say,
we were dumb
when we were young.

an understanding among the meek,
no more strings of pearls,
the subtle differences between
getting high and falling in love.

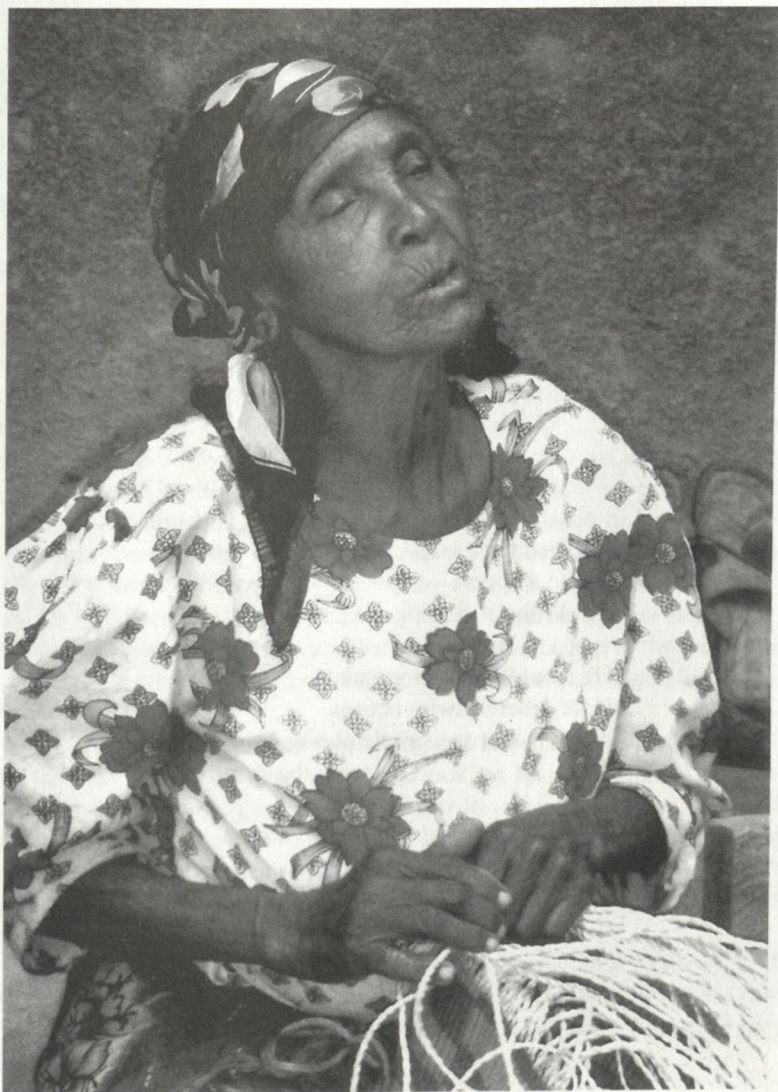
a nagging tongue in cheek,
tithing girls use words
like success and failure
for red-lined in-betweens.

black-eyed susans dancing
to celebrate the continuity of time
and the supple sea writhing with
tender ebb and flow.

we were dumb
when we were young, but
when the battle is over,
we are one.

"You don't always win your battles, but it's good to know you fought."
-- John Greenleaf Whittier

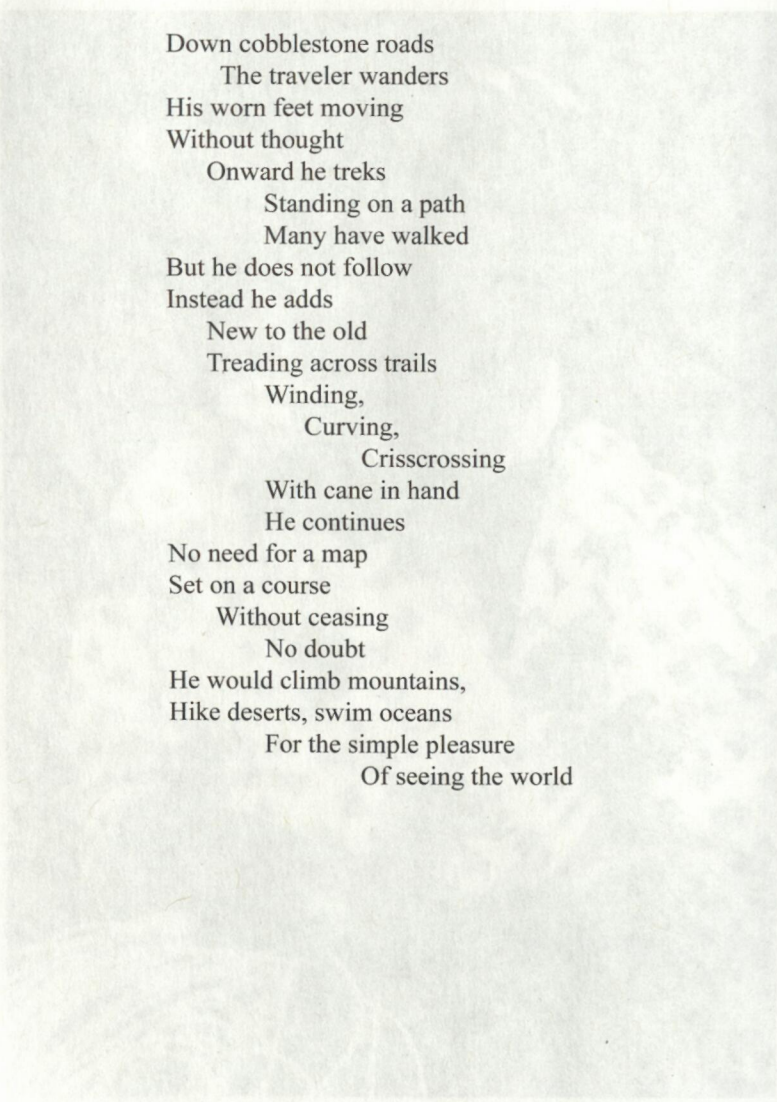
Heshima (“Respect”)



*“The camera makes everyone a tourist in other people’s reality,
and eventually in one’s own.”*

-- Susan Sontag

Down Cobblestone Roads



Down cobblestone roads
The traveler wanders
His worn feet moving
Without thought
Onward he treks
Standing on a path
Many have walked
But he does not follow
Instead he adds
New to the old
Treading across trails
Winding,
Curving,
Crisscrossing
With cane in hand
He continues
No need for a map
Set on a course
Without ceasing
No doubt
He would climb mountains,
Hike deserts, swim oceans
For the simple pleasure
Of seeing the world

"We haven't traveled enough to carve out our identity on the road yet."
-- Trevor Pryce

Passion Driven

Danny Freison woke up at 6:45 a.m. to his alarm clock radio, which was always tuned into 93.1 FM playing "Today's latest hits for you in the morning." He got out of bed, undressed himself, and stepped into the shower. As the water pellets hit his face, he hoped they might wash away his stirring thoughts. Where was the excitement, the thrill, the enthusiasm? Where was the adventure? He had a beautiful wife, Sarah, who loved him, cherished him, and supported him. He had two wonderful children as well. Ben, age fifteen, excelled at academics and sports. Lisa, age twelve, had many good friends and attended church group every week. But he was unhappy with the life he had chosen, a life he had once sworn he would never lead. In high school, he had dreams of pursuing a career in acting. He had excelled at the craft at a young age and played the lead role in all his school plays. But he felt parental pressure pushing him in a different direction. So, he chose business. He also had a great desire to travel, see the world, and encounter different cultures, but he never got the chance to do any of that either. Now, Danny was moving up through the ranks at the financial advising company for which he worked. He was earning a good salary. His life seemed healthy on the outside, but on the inside, he was gasping for air.

After Danny finished preparing for the day, he entered his Beamer and drove to work. He thought about the day ahead of him and the various tasks that needed to be completed. After a few minutes had gone by, he reflected upon his life decisions again. He hated how boring he had become; he hated being typical. What he used to think was fine and normal, he now despised: the nice cars in the nice garage attached to the nice house, which held the nice family. No, he didn't hate those things... he simply hated how conventional they made him feel.

As he tried to rid his mind of these things, he rolled into his reserved parking spot. He trudged into the office building, a gloomy look on his face. One of his co-workers, Bill, passed him in the hallway and greeted him with a crisp, confident, "Good morning, Dan!" Danny perked up quickly and responded likewise. He often thought that one of the main reasons he was able to excel in the corporate world was because he had developed his acting skills as a young person. He was quite good at convincing people that he was a motivated employee.

He walked into his office and collapsed in his chair. *I have to focus*, he thought. *I have to get rid of these thoughts... I have a great life. This is reality. Why do I have such a problem getting past that?* He had a morning meeting in a half hour. That gave him enough time to make a couple phone calls to clients.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Throughout my college career, I have been encouraged to pursue my passions. This is something that can be difficult to figure out and demands time, consideration, and experimentation. "Passion Driven" attempts to illustrate the predicament people find themselves in after failing to carefully uncover what they are truly passionate about.

The half hour eventually came to an end, and Danny pulled himself out of the chair. The meeting ran long. He ate lunch, stayed late catching up on work, and finally left around eight o'clock. Driving home, bitterness began to swell up inside him. *I hate my job*, he thought to himself. *I honestly hate my job, and it's what I do most of the day... ha, it's a hell of a life.*

Danny pulled into the driveway at 8:23 p.m., feeling sulky and exhausted. He walked into the house to find his wife and kids watching a movie together on the couch. Dirty dishes filled the sink.

"Hey Hun," his wife said. *So much for a warm welcome*, Danny thought. He walked over to the sink. "I guess you ate without me," he said.

"Did you say something? Oh, hey, your dinner is in the microwave."

"Yeah, thanks." Danny set the timer for two minutes and pushed Start. *I slave away all day and they don't even appreciate it. I do all this for them, and they don't even care.*

Danny took his meal upstairs to his room and collapsed on the bed. He shut his eyes and began to daydream. *What if I had done things differently? What if I had just studied what I wanted to study in college? What if I went to New York after graduation? What if Sarah and I never dated?... Then life would be different-- I'd do what I want to do. I'd go where I want to go. There are just so many...responsibilities.* He sighed, turned on the T.V., and ate his dinner.

Sarah entered their room just as Danny was setting his cleared plate to the side. She smiled at him. "How was work?"

"Oh, fine. You know-- the usual."

"I suppose. You seem tired."

"Yeah, it was another long day."

"We missed you tonight."

"Well, you could have waited for me to get home before you ate dinner."

"I didn't know when you were going to get home."

"Well, no wonder. You never called."

"Look Danny, I'm sorry, it's just that I've got the kids here starving. There's already food in the oven. They want to watch a movie, and even I rarely get the chance to just sit down and spend time with them... I'm sorry. I'll call before we start next time." She left the room to get ready for bed.

Danny stared at the television screen. The show he was watching was on a commercial break. *T.V. again. This is so boring! We'll talk a bit. Then, we'll sleep, and I'll be back to the grind tomorrow.* Danny slowly started to doze off until something on the television grabbed his attention: "Do you have experience acting? The Philips Theatre will be having auditions for 'A Christmas Carol' on September 12 and 13. If interested, please call 547-1003." Danny quickly grabbed the pen and paper on his nightstand and wrote down the number. He folded up the piece of paper and set it next to his watch and wallet. He wasn't even quite sure why he wrote down the number. He certainly didn't have time to be pursuing some hobby-- not at this point in his career. But it excited him nonetheless. He felt young again by simply considering the idea.

The next morning, Danny woke up to his radio alarm clock. He showered and got dressed. As he was putting his watch on, he spotted the folded piece of paper with the

number on it. *Oh, I'll take it just in case*, he thought. The day went by as it usually did for Danny. Nothing too exciting happened, which is why he couldn't get this theatre idea out of his brain. *Just forget about it*, Danny, he told himself. You know it doesn't make sense. It got to be about six o'clock and he was almost done for the day-- earlier than usual. He packed up his briefcase and locked his office door behind him. As he was walking out to his car, he reached into his pocket for a mint, only to find the folded piece of paper between his fingers. He couldn't take it any longer. He had to at least call and figure out the details. The audition dates weren't for another week. He still had time to think about it. There was no need to make a commitment that very second.

He made the phone call. After five minutes of discussing the theatre's productions, he was hooked. He now had no choice. To abandon this new opportunity would be to abandon his dream. And he wasn't going to do it again. This was the answer-- the answer to all his problems. All he had to do was follow his passion and life would be happy again. He would have something to live for.

Danny went in a week later to audition. He tried out for the part of Scrooge, the lead role. After his reading, the director was very pleased and said, "You've done this before, haven't you?"

"Yes. I acted in high school and a little in college."

"Well, we'll give you a call in a couple days."

Danny decided not to tell his wife that he had auditioned for the play. He didn't think she would have supported it, considering he was scraping for family time as it was. Plus, it wasn't a certainty that he would get the part anyway.

Two days later, Danny received a call at work informing him that he would play the part of Scrooge. He had trouble focusing on his work the rest of the day. He whistled the entire way home and walked in with a smile on his face.

"Good day at work?" Sarah asked.

"Eh, it was a typical day at the office. Same old, same old."

The family sat down for dinner. Danny asked Ben and Lisa how their days at school went. "This is a superbly cooked chicken, dear."

Sarah looked surprised at his remark. "Uh, thanks."

"Oh, Hun, before I forget to tell you-- we lost a few people this week, so I'm going to have to stay late at work for awhile. You know, we kind of have to play catch up."

"How late do you think you'll be?"

"Geez, uh, I probably won't get home until after nine for awhile. I know, it's ridiculous..."

Danny's lie worked for the time being, but he knew that he would have to come up with other reasons in the future. Rehearsal was held Monday through Thursday from seven to nine p.m. for the next three months.

Danny felt like he was on top of the world. Every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, he would leave work at 6:30 and go to rehearsal. His new endeavor motivated him to work more efficiently during the day. He was able to get all his work done and go to practice.

Danny did feel Sarah growing suspicious. Supposedly, he was working longer hours than ever, but he was coming home every night at 9:30 seeming much happier than he had been in a long time. First, he said he was just catching up on other people's work.

Then he said he had to go to the gym after work. His annual ski trip was coming up, and he definitely needed to be in good shape for that, so it sounded like a good reason. Still, Sarah probed him for answers. She would often ask, "Why do they make you do all the work?" or "Does it really take you that long to work out?"

"Time just gets away from me," he would respond. He wanted to tell her. He didn't enjoy keeping secrets from her. Would she even understand this sudden spontaneity? He didn't know. All he had ever done since they got together was take the practical route: business school, the affordable home, the dollar movie theatre, coupon cutting, grocery shopping.

One Saturday, Danny was studying his lines while using the restroom. After he was finished he walked into the kitchen. Sarah asked him, "Why were you in there so long?"

Danny grinned and said, "Good time to catch up on my sports reading. I'm going out to mow the lawn."

Sarah was cleaning the house that day. After she finished dusting the cabinet tops in the kitchen, she moved on to the bathroom. When she was leaning over the tub, she noticed a bright green booklet at the back side of the magazine rack. It looked unfamiliar to her, so she naturally took a closer look. She pulled it out and read the cover: *A Christmas Carol*.

It was Danny's big day, Friday the 18th of December, Opening Night. He got out of work at 4:45, a personal record for efficiency. The play started at 7 p.m. at the Philips Theatre downtown. He told Sarah that he would be out with the guys for a couple drinks that night. The kids were spending the night at some friends' houses, so he told her to catch a movie.

Danny could barely keep himself still as the make-up artists readied him for the opening scene. He conversed excitedly with his cast members. His dream was about to be manifested. He had not held back this time.

Seven o'clock finally came and the production was underway. The crowd loved his comedic expressions. There was absolute stillness during his more somber parts. During the intermission, the director and cast members told him he was doing a fantastic job. It was the best they had ever seen. "You could make it on Broadway!" they would say. The rest of the production went magnificently. At the curtain call, the crowd cheered excitedly. Danny received a standing ovation and felt as though he had finally found his place in the world. No more fleeting aspirations. He was a born actor. He finally felt like he was swimming with the current instead of upstream.

When Danny returned home, he found Sarah sitting on the couch. She was motionless. "I was there," she said.

"You were where...?" Danny asked timidly.

"Don't play dumb with me Danny. This *is* what you've been doing all this time, isn't it? This... play?"

Danny didn't know what to say.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I-- I didn't think you'd support it..."

"Why would you think that?"

"Because-- I-- I don't know...How did you even find out?"

"I found the play book and the rehearsal schedule."

Danny hung his head. He didn't want to tell her what he was really thinking. He looked back up to find his wife's inquisitive eyes.

"Look, sometimes, I just feel like I gave up on all my dreams-- everything that was important to me. I wanted to be an actor once, you know. And I'm not saying that you aren't important to me, but..."

"But what?" Sarah asked with a gulp.

"I hate what I do, Sarah. I hate my job. And when I come home from work to find my family sitting on the couch watching a movie, sometimes the only thing that goes through my mind is... *responsibility*."

Sarah's blank stare demanded more explanation.

"I can't get away from it. I wish I could go back in time so I could have made different choices. I'm not saying I wouldn't have married you. I'm just saying... I don't know. I think I would have waited longer to marry you. I would have pursued my other dreams first. I wouldn't have made so many sacrifices so soon."

"Well, Danny, if you had talked to me, I'm sure we could have worked something out. I don't understand why--"

"Would you have really supported this, Sarah? I mean *really*. I've hardly been home the last few months."

"I don't know, Danny. I'm sure we could have figured something out. You haven't ever said anything like this before, though. Why didn't you tell me? I still don't understand why you wouldn't--"

"Because you make that part of my life impossible."

"Ha! Well, I *apologize* for limiting you so much! Danny, everyone makes sacrifices. This is what we agreed to when we first got married. You can't just change plans whenever you feel like it when you have two kids. You just can't do that. Do you even realize how much this hurts me, Danny? Do you *realize* how much pain you can cause by..."

Danny knew what was coming now. It was the same speech he had always been given: "You have responsibilities. You can't just do whatever you please. Chasing silly dreams is a waste of time. You have to focus on the real work." Danny didn't want to hear it. Now, it had become ever clearer to him that if he had found his place in the world-- even if he was born to be an actor from the start-- it didn't matter anymore. He had already made his choices. Would he grow to be an irritable, old man with no excitement in his life, no passion? Would he look back on his life and just have regrets? That would probably be the case, he thought. But it didn't matter. It was all over. Danny turned around and walked upstairs, neglecting the person across the room with tears streaming down her face.

Crippled

My hunched back aims my head down
causing my eyes always to be facing the Under-
ground.

My shoulders burdened by the hump on my back
I carry my load on the leg on the left
dragging the right leg of reason
scraping it along the gray pavement
my permanently brown shoe digging
and digging the ground into confusion.

From head to foot I am a cripple.
Breathing hard, moving slow, sloshing my step.

My handicap makes a mess for all to see
for me to see
see farther Underground
deeper into the filth
into the confusion of me.

And I lose more respect
for the damned cripple
that is me.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This poem was written after I had read the first couple pages of Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground* and heavily references that work. The narrator asks the rhetorical question, "Can a man of perception respect himself at all?" That question was brewing in the back of my mind for days when I sat down and wrote this poem.

Canto of Pride

After leaving that circle, I and my Guide,
The great and perserverant Virgil,
Continued down the black path.
Suddenly we came to a dark cavern;
A huge ominous bowl,
Full and overflowing, with billowing cloud.
It was a thick and menacing cloud
Charged with Sin,
To chill the body and the soul.
As it swept up the ledge to where we were,
I looked down at my feet,
Now licked by evil smoke.
I found what was crushing under me was
Hundreds of black and dead
Decaying and crumbling flowers.
I bent down, distracted by this first hellish echo of beauty.
Reaching for one, I recognized the bud
As the narcissus flower.
Suddenly I became aware of the terrible noise.
Churning up from the unending pit came
A terrible screaming, thunder roll of shouting.
Looking down (into) the cavity, I began to make out
The shapes of people, so ugly,
(That) they were almost beyond recognition.
Each person stood upon a pedestal surrounded
By the bilious cloud, unable to see
Any but themselves.
Only able to focus on themselves, and
Their terrible blemishes
Were now totally apparent.
“Oh Guide,” said I, “who are these deformed gargoyles,
Illumined only to themselves,
Isolated in their misery?”

*“What have your souls to boast of and be proud?
You are no more than insects, incomplete
as any grub until it burst the shroud.” -- Dante Alighieri, Purgatorio*

"They are the proud," he replied to me. "So proud in life

That they placed themselves on a pedestal,

They recognized only their own importance,

"They didn't listen to others in life.

So now, in death they can only

Hear themselves scream into the abyss."

"But what, oh greatest of poets, has caused

Their hideous appearance? Surely

They didn't look thus on earth?"

And he: "This is the appearance of their soul.

This is the physical representation

Of the stains they ignored in life."

Looking back to the chasm I began to realize

The number of people present

Stretched into the distance.

The sheer magnitude overwhelmed me,

And I once again turned to my guide

With a question.

"Why do they shout? In every other circle

That we have endured,

There is only pain and misery.

"Here, however there is just bellowing.

Shouting, shouting,

As if to make themselves heard."

My Guide turned to me and replied that in life,

They only considered their voice important,

Now they are doomed to scream their story for all eternity,

Trapped in this oppressive smoke,

Condemned to be totally, wholly alone.

To desperately try and make someone hear.

I once again faced the boiling depression

And sought to distinguish

A single cry from the multitude.

Soon I began to make out a Greek tongue

Shouting out its tale,

Loud and desperate.

"I am Odysseus!" it cried. "Listen to me.

Listen to my story!

Who else is as magnificent?

"If there is anyone out there hear my tale!

I was taught from the cradle up

That for a hero, such as myself

"Pride is the mark of a true warrior!

I was revered by many,

Admired for my pride through history!

- "Unlike all others, I had no one tell me
 That pride is a sin; they only
 Spoke of its merits!
- "I too saw hellish spirits before my time.
 I heard the sirens,
 I escaped Calypso.
- "I am Laertes' son. Men hold me formidable
 For guile in peace and war:
 This fame has gone abroad to the sky's rim! *
- "I am Odysseus, raider of cities!
 Listen to my chronicle of greatness,
 Not to be matched during the stretch of time!"
- Repulsed by his prideful claim,
 I tuned my ear to a different voice,
 This one English in tone.
- "Hear my story!" he cried.
 Hear mine.
 My royal tale alone is worthy!
- "Stop now, all unseen passers, and listen.
 Listen to my history,
 That most tragic of all tales.
- "I was the king of the greatest nation on earth.
 Ruler of the seas,
 Ruler of the industrious British!
- "I thought I had the divine right to rule,
 God-ordained,
 Therefore I must be right.
- "I had the right to pride,
 I was His majesty the King!
 Henry VIII, revered then, and now!
- "I did not listen to my subjects.
 I had them sent to this pit of hell
 When they impeded my ways.
- "They had no voice in my mind,
 The only wish important enough
 To consider was mine.
- "I had six wives, all imperfect,
 None good enough
 To last in my court.
- "When you think of royalty,
 Think of me.
 Tell my story to those above.
- "When you think of majesty,
 Remember me and my
 Story of woe, all who stop to listen."

Many other stories I heard too,
 Most longer, some shorter.
 I listened again and heard in the distance
 A German, loud and pompous.
 "I am Baron Thunder-Ten-Tronckh. **
 You would have heard of me many a time,
 "My house, my castle, was the jewel of Westphalia. ***
 My prize of architecture,
 Known for its respected and glorious inhabitants.
 "It had a door! And windows!
 My grand, beautiful great hall
 Was even hung with a tapestry!
 "Great was my rule, and revered was my personage.
 Stop and listen
 If you are there at all.
 "On earth I was called 'My Lord.'
 My stories were very fine,
 And the people laughed.
 "Noble were my dogs, and in such multitude,
 That on occasion
 They even made up a hunting pack."
 On and on he went in the same strain,
 Talking about his castle
 And his lands and his ham. ****
 So many stories I could hear,
 Echoing through the smoke,
 Emitted from their disfigured faces.
 Blocking my ears to their shouts,
 I turned to my eminent guide again.
 "Do they hear the others' screaming?" I asked.
 "When they were living," spoke Virgil,
 They were advised by many,
 But heard none,
 "Now they hear only a murmur,
 A constant unrelenting noise that
 Can't be shut out or separated to focus on only one."
 As he spoke he turned and continued along the ledge
 That ran around the caverns rim,
 Heading towards a path.
 While we walked the billowing cloud
 Snaked around my legs,
 Clogging my nose with its cloying thickness.
 Suddenly I felt it more than ever,
 This loneliness, pervading every part of me,
 Chilling me and weakening my knees.

Each man, shouting in the darkness,
 Unable to step, forward or back,
 Inescapably alone for all eternity.
I was very glad to escape the darkness of that isolation;
 The heavy, oppressive shade,
 The stories of despicable pride told in vain.
Down we traveled, away from that pit of darkness and bulging cloud.
 Down into the darkness, following my Guide,
 Along the rough, hidden and treacherous track to the lowest
 depths of hell.

NOTES

* This stanza is directly quoted from Homer's *Odyssey*.

** Candide's uncle in the story *Candide* by Voltaire. Written in 1759, it would never have been read by Dante, who died in 1321. However, like Henry VIII, who was born in 1491, the Baron was known to me, so since hell is beyond time, so is "Dante's" writing.

*** Westphalia is a particularly ugly province of Germany in the lower Rhineland.

**** Westphalia is known mostly for its amazing ham, so along with his castle, I had the Baron rave about the ham.

Soon

"The doctor will be in to speak with you momentarily."

Renelle was tired. She slumped back into her too-comfortable lounge seat. It seemed that this was all her life consisted of anymore: waiting. Waiting for the doctor. Waiting for the diagnosis. Waiting for the end.

She tried to block out the sounds around her: the squeak of the receding matron's shoes on the institutional flooring, the heavy breathing of the overweight white-haired man sitting beside her, and the hum of the electric fan spinning lazily overhead. It chanted the redundant refrain of "soon, soon, soon."

She shifted in her overstuffed chair. She supposed that the chair was the hospital's olive branch-- an appeasement of sorts, and an apology for the interminable waits and the pat answers that never really helped anything. She sighed again, sinking deeper into her chair and into thought. Unintentionally, she relaxed and began to sink into a doze. As soon as her eyes shut, her vision was filled with a foreign scene.

It felt like a Van Gogh painting. That's how she knew she was dreaming. She was in a field. The sun was high overhead, and there were harvesters swinging scythes in time. All of the colors were vivid and a bit disjointed. It was like looking through a kaleidoscope.

Someone was walking towards her. Through the swirling haze of harvest dust and vibrant color, she couldn't quite determine who it was. It was a woman. The approaching figure walked with the long strides of Renelle's mother, but the slight stoop of her father. It was probably how Renelle herself walked.

The figure was close enough to identify now, but Renelle didn't recognize her. The woman's hair was red and frizzy from the walk in the sun. If Renelle had to guess, she would have guessed the woman was about four years her senior.

When she was close enough, the woman locked eyes with Renelle. She was happy; Renelle could see that from the laugh lines around her eyes. The woman smiled-- the broad, relaxed smile of someone who is seeing a dear friend. She stopped in front of Renelle, planted her feet, and looked as though she was preparing to give a very important

*"Life is full of misery, loneliness, and suffering--
and it's all over much too soon." -- Woody Allen*

proclamation.

As soon as the woman spoke, Renelle remembered who this woman was. How could she not have realized sooner? The woman's message was almost lost on her as she pondered the woman's appearance, but it echoed as the colors of Van Gogh's field faded. "Soon."

Renelle awoke with a start. The doctor was beside her, studying her, like she was an interesting and baffling specimen. When her eyes opened, he jumped back with a start, like a kid caught eating a forbidden before-dinner cookie.

She waited for him to sit back in the chair he had drawn up, and waited a few seconds longer for him to resettle his startled features. Before he even spoke, she knew it would only be the same rundown of comments that she had heard before. The first words out of his mouth confirmed that.

"We've never seen anything like this move so quickly."

She nodded, waiting for the good news that was sure to follow such a strong statement. Doctors always started with the bad news.

"There's only one thing to do."

Here came her salvation. It had to come.

"We must operate now. Within twenty-four hours."

"Now?"

"It has spread too quickly for us to wait longer. A nurse is on hand to begin the anesthesia process for you. Is there anyone you need to contact? Family? Husband?"

"No, there's no one."

"I'll send the nurse in with the paperwork, and we'll get you into surgery as soon as we can."

The doctor left.

This time, no sound of his hasty retreat reached Renelle's ears. The fan's muttering was gone too. There was only the sound of her own breathing. Her lungs felt too empty; it was hard to catch a breath. She felt like she was moving at double-speed. Yes, she had wanted an answer. Yes, she had wanted a solution. She had even wanted the closure of this last desperate attempt to save her life.

But not yet.

It was too soon.

She really didn't feel that sick. Only tired. For the first time, it felt real. She was going in to surgery. Finally, they were going to do something about this.

She blinked, drawing in a slow, measured breath.

Calm.

She needed to be calm.

The nurse she had seen before entered the room. She silently handed a clipboard to Renelle, avoiding eye contact, and then quickly returned to her desk.

She looked down at the papers before her.

Name, Renelle Hanson.

Age, 28.

Height. Weight. Address. Social security number.

She filled in box after box, defining who she was.

She reached the line that read Family. She wrote "none."

Next was Family medical history. Yes, others in her family had suffered from this. She paused for a moment, thinking of her parents and older sister. Yes, her family had been through this before her.

The nurse returned, took the clipboard from Renelle, and motioned for her to follow. As the woman turned, Renelle caught a glimpse of emotion in the nurse's carefully-averted eyes. It was quickly blinked away and replaced by the same sterile nurse mask Renelle had seen before.

As she followed the nurse from the waiting room, Renelle tried to put a name to the emotion. It wasn't pity, exactly; nurses see sick people all the time. It wasn't fear either; what Renelle had was not contagious. The look had been something in between. A buried emotion that feared the unknown and the uncertainty of life. It gave Renelle the chills. She could feel the worry and doubt surrounding her, feeding on the uncertainty.

It grew as the nurse led her to a table in the operating room. It spiked as the nurse pushed the I.V. of anesthesia into her arm. And it peaked when the doctor entered the room.

His eyes told Renelle the same story: He was uncertain. They were taking the only course of action left open to them. But there were no guarantees.

She was growing sleepy again. This time the exhaustion was fueled by the drugs. As she drifted off once more, her tension eased. One way or the other, the waiting and searching were over.

Renelle closed her eyes with worry and doubt hovering over her for the last time. She would know soon enough.

Bridge



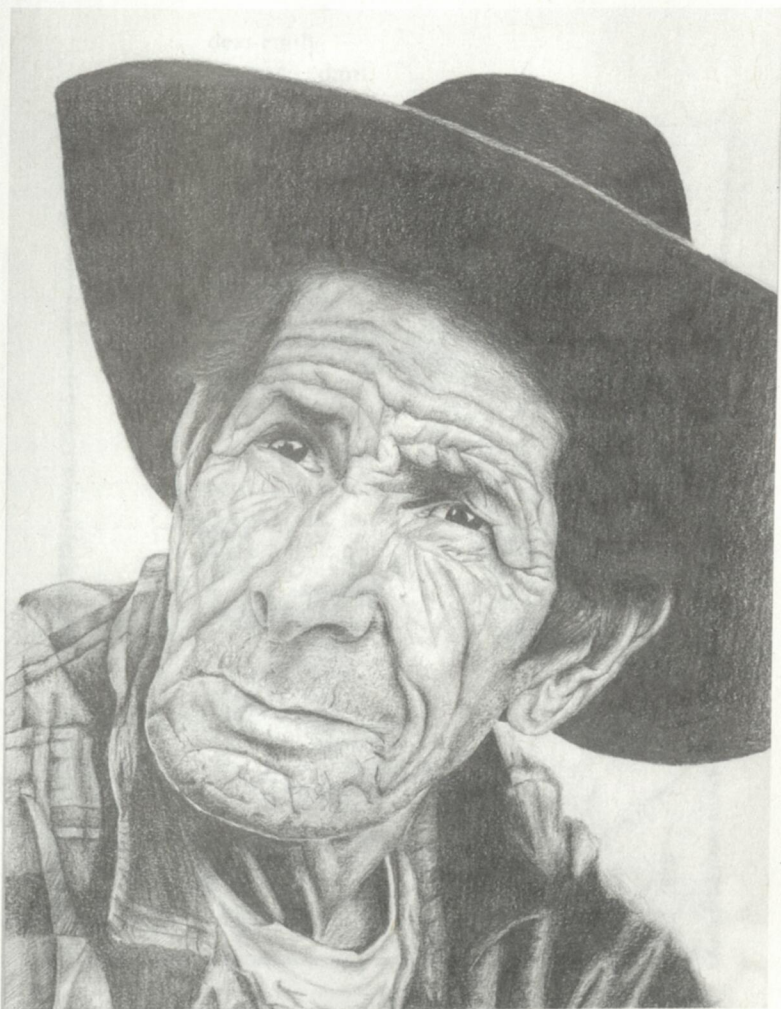
*"I am seeking for the bridge which leans from
the visible world to the invisible through reality." -- Max Beckmann*

Where Are All the Spoons?

it
starts
with
a
solitary
spoon
innocently
laid
to
rest
on
the
stainless
steeled
plot
called
the
kitchen
sink: that
flatware graveyard
where all utensils will
be one day buried in
an unmarked grave and
covered over with pots
pans lids cups mugs
and forgotten until
we cannot eat
for the
heap

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The assignment for this piece was to write a shape poem. The concept came from spending two hours doing dishes at the sink in Fairlane Apartment 1L.

Montoya



ARTIST'S NOTE: I drew this picture after seeing it in *National Geographic*. I chose it because I love wrinkles-- on other people, not me. I chose a career as an English teacher rather than an artist because it's so much more lucrative.

Virginia



"A masterpiece is something said once and for all, stated, finished, so that it's there complete in the mind, if only at the back." -- Virginia Woolf

Emily

dear emily,
i have to admit
you interest me,
despite the fact
that the world has
distorted your beauty,
folded it to fit
neatly into tight boxes.
but i like to picture you
the way it was
decades ago, with your
piles of papers,
tying all those
neat little bows,
perfectly revealing
the pain and loneliness
in each little pile.

*"Life itself, however, flows and is sequential
and punishes those who try to compartmentalize it."
-- Margaret Halsey*

The Lord's Day

Dozens of pairs of church shoes shuffled as we methodically stepped into neat rows. I sat down near the end of the second line, wedged in between my roommate, Erica, and a freshman from our dorm, Liz. We were early, so I flipped through my bulletin, amused by references to groups called "Bible Bowl" and "Stitch 'n Chat" and one particularly odd acronym, "Mixed N.U.T.S.," that said it was for families and singles. *I wouldn't attend a Sunday school class called Mixed Nuts if Billy Graham was teaching it*, I thought charitably.

Eventually, a woman with sparkly earrings stepped up to the podium and I gave her my attention. Instead of starting the service, she shouted over the organ music for people to make room for the ones still trickling in. She asked the outside sections to shift farther toward the ends of our rows and for the middle section to move toward the center, motioning with her hands to demonstrate. She looked out of place behind the pulpit, as if she should be standing in the aisle of a 747 instead, wearing a pin with a set of wings on it.

I was already occupying as small a space as I am able, so I busied myself examining the backs of the two middle-aged women sitting in front of me. One of them, the pastor's wife, was wearing a white, two-piece blouse. The other had on a button-up shirt with vertical stripes of green and brown in varying shades and widths. It reminded me of a garden full of weeds. Her medium brown hair was thick and cropped just above her shoulders. She had curled the ends under and the effect made her look something like a large mushroom popping out among the greenery. I hoped I would never dress like that.

Finally, the organ took its last moaning breath and I saw that a choir had assembled on the platform. They began singing a song about being friends with Jesus that sounded vaguely familiar from my Baptist upbringing. Just when I thought they would stop, the key shifted and I realized this was a medley. One of the younger women of the choir began a solo about rowing to the other side with Jesus as her boat. I can usually appreciate a good metaphor, but in song this was just too much. Erica and I grinned at each other, suppressing laughter.

The singer took a deep breath and plowed on; I noticed that in spite of her unfortunate role in this musical ensemble, she was actually quite pretty and her face almost seemed to be glowing. I don't know where the thought came from, but I suddenly wondered if she was pregnant.

The choir hit one last high note, then silence reigned as they filed off of the

"Let your religion be less of a theory and more of a love affair."

-- G.K. Chesterton

stage. As their profiles passed in front of us one by one, I saw that the woman who had sung the solo was, in fact, expecting a baby. Erica elbowed me again. "Look. Isn't she cute?" I nodded, pleased with myself for having been so observant.

At last the pastor took the floor and began preaching. He opened with a story about his children growing up, all the while pacing back and forth and waving his Bible around. The kids would think of excuses not to go to sleep, he said, insisting over and over that they needed to go to the bathroom or get a glass of water. They would be unsatisfied until they had one of their parents present in the room to ward off monsters and scary noises. His shining, black shoes rivaled his bald head, each trying to reflect more of the spotlight. He crouched down low, pantomiming sitting on the end of his son's bed. After that he talked about the presence of God, I think.

The sermon had barely begun, and the pew I was sitting on was becoming more uncomfortable by the minute. I shifted my weight, uncrossing and recrossing my legs, trying not to kick Liz in the process. Her shoes were made of an intricate pattern of black and white strips of leather. My own brown flats looked boring in comparison, and I wondered again if the pants I had dug out of the recesses of my closet were brown, green, or gray. I hoped they didn't clash with my sweater. I probably should have woken up the first time my alarm went off and I might have looked better.

I was surprised to see the pastor already taking his seat in the pew in front of me, the creases beneath his bald head sweatier now than they had been before his sermon. Ushers began passing around a communion tray laden with tiny cracker squares and juice cups. My mind drifted as we waited for all the rows behind us to be served. I looked over and couldn't see Liz's cracker. Had I missed eating the body of Christ? I discreetly placed mine in my mouth and tried to look like I was just scratching my nose, chewing as slowly and quietly as possible.

One of the ushers began praying about what we were about to partake. Oops. Everyone else ate their crackers, Liz's appearing from I don't know where. I once again lifted my hand, this time actually scratching my nose while pretending to eat a cracker, and pantomimed chewing.

I paid more attention so I didn't miss the part about the blood. It's harder to fake swallowing grape juice.

Finally, we all rose for a closing hymn, something about "O King Eternal." Then the pastor returned to the pulpit in order to leave us with a prayer and a few closing words--something about, "Let us not say that God has been present here and we almost missed it." I don't really remember.

KAYE PATTON

Untitled



*"The colour of my soul is iron-grey
and sad bats wheel about the steeple of my dreams."
-- Claude Debussy*

Imagination

I know a place outside of space
Where garden shears are swords
Where running is the only pace
And no one's ever bored

"The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity."
-- Ellen Parr

Passengers

We were, the two of us, relieved to see
the seat empty between our wary elbows.
And this despite the firmly marked armrests.
We'd both bought magazines and paper-wrapped
sandwiches; we eyed each other's selections.

Maybe the flight time hung like fasten
seatbelt lights overhead saying-- speak
to strangers, compare your fortunes--
printed cryptic across flimsy white sheets--
and tell all your best jokes.

We spoke of disappointment, from our loft
over the world, where the sunshine
sparkles like our ginger ales sipped steady.
Until stewardesses gathered the plastic
cups drained of conversation pauses.

Clouds thinning, the ground hurried to meet us.
Blinking; rattling; slowing; conversation
like seatbacks, straightened and locked upright.
We remembered our seat assignments and
overhead bags with obligations zipped inside.

"Those empty seats-- always breaking promises."

-- Chris Tindal

Passing Train



ARTIST'S NOTE: As some friends and I were waiting for our train to arrive, this train passed through the station. I happened to have my camera and took this shot without any real expectations. I'm glad that kid walked into the frame or this would have been a really boring shot. Take what you will from it, but personally the photo reminds me of growing up and the process of maturity.

Addiction

Addiction: a state of physiological or psychological dependence on a potentially harmful drug.

Addiction-- that sounds vaguely familiar-- a little too familiar. Maybe this is a better beginning to my story:

Hello, my name is _____ and I am addicted. Not to alcohol or drugs, though. I sort of wish I was, and then perhaps I could numb the pain while harming myself with a dangerous dependence. Unfortunately, I am addicted to my unrequited love.

This is my story of addiction and attempt at recovery...

It happened one autumn: My heart stopped working. It had been given to a perfect someone. He was perfect for my heart in every way-- perfect in the way he loved it, perfect in the way he lied to it and perfect in the way he left it. This series of events involved betrayal, gossip, and lies and managed to suck the very beat out of my heart. It just had no motivation to carry on, so it chose to become numb. It was numb to feelings, numb to pain, numb to joy, numb to everyone and everything.

(Enter scene: my "potentially harmful" drug-- the reason for my addiction.)

It was September and memories of my betrayer and his Judas kiss played constantly in my head. I did nothing to stop the thoughts because the numbness dulled any pain. It was a particularly pathetic weekend of self pity. I decided to force myself to be social and that is when I met him, my drug of choice. I discovered that night that a small part of my heart was not numb. I looked at him and suddenly I felt. I felt him in my very being.

(Take note: it is oftentimes the first drink or hit that starts a person down the slippery slope of addiction.)

He was beautiful with his messy hair and dark eyes. He allured me with his sin-

"Love is not enough. It must be the foundation, the cornerstone-- but not the complete structure. It is much too pliable, too yielding."

-- Bette Davis

cere smile and contagious laugh. I studied him that night and began to learn who he was. I saw his strengths. I saw his fears. I saw his failures. He was not perfect, like my previous Judas. He was flawed, and I loved him for it.

He liked me too. He thought I was interesting and pretty. I could tell. But I was good. Good girls don't become addicts. That all changed when he looked at me. It was the look that I would see again... and again... and again. It is a cursed look-- a look of hope. I blame this look for my addiction.

My addiction followed me into winter. The cold weeks were swept up in a mixture of emotions as I struggled with my drug dependence. Some days, he acted like I was important. He would talk to me and listen intently as we discussed the world's problems. Other days, he ignored me. He pushed aside my questions and care. Those days, I thought my wounded heart would break.

Then came Christmas time and I was lonely. He decided that I was nothing. I was invisible. I was just another devotee to his charm. I tried to leave him behind and move on. He sensed this and decided he would toy with my emotions with his sudden attentiveness. When he spoke to me, it would make my heart feel so intensely that my breath would stop. My addiction was too deep to cut him off. I was lost in him-- lost in everything he was and was not. I saw him for the sincere person he was. He never saw me.

He never sees me.

Then it happened; I was suddenly freed. He left me that spring for something "better." He told me he needed a change. He needed to see new things and he was bored. I looked at him and for the first time, I saw ugliness in his selfishness. I could breathe, and happily, my heart could go back to its numb state. I was in rehab and ready to heal. During my rehab, I became the drug of another. This addict loved me. He thought I would be his everything. He was good and I felt nothing for him. The more he loved me, the more I wanted my cursed drug. Oh, the irony of life.

My drug returned before summer. He "needed to see me" and my not-so-numb heart felt more than ever before. That night we talked for hours, causing me to be pulled back into a relapse. I sat across from him as his eyes pierced me; he listened to me and judged me for what I was not: I was not him. He saw my strengths. He saw my fears. He saw my failures. I was good and he hated me for it. He hated me because I was different than him.

Despite his new-found hatred, he continued to suck me into his deadly trap. He told me I was good and he was sorry. I told him he was flawed and that he did not know me. He told me things, things no one else knew. He opened up about his wants and desires and

I listened. He was imperfect and I was infatuated. I saw vulnerability in his selfishness.

The good in me loves the fault in him.

It's September again and time continues at the same dangerous speed, yet nothing changes. I am psychologically addicted to him. He is my harmful drug. He is always haunting my thoughts and my dreams. I am always running from the thoughts of how great it would be if he would finally see me, if he would want me.

He will never want me, for I am not him.

I see him. My heart stops. I am left frozen by the power he has over me. He is flawed and it is beautiful. I can never get enough. Any sort of taste of what we could be and I am on a high for the next week. My mind is controlled by the drug's influence: why doesn't he see me?

Reality hits me, bringing me back to earth with a blow. Drugs have no feelings. They do not care about who is devoted to them or who is addicted. They only have eyes for themselves.

Sober: not under the influence of drugs or alcohol; serious;
dull; not fanciful or speculative.

After a year of heart torment, I wonder what it would be like to be sober of him. To be sober is to no longer wonder about the possibility of him and me. No longer speculate that if he knew me, if he truly knew me, he would want me. It is to be serious and dull. It is to give up all hope of us. It is to push away all thoughts of how maybe, just maybe we were meant for each other and one day he will see just that.

To be sober is to be numb.

It's been a year of not being numb and at times, the pain is so sharp, it takes my breath away. Unrequited love is a continuous feeling of pain that can not be dulled by present pleasures. It is a reoccurrence of memories, thoughts, and dreams. It is a ghost that haunts only when its victim attempts to move on. It is a constant state of relapse. After a year, I still feel him. I feel him in my very being.

My addiction caused me to feel again.

The First Four Seconds

are just peachy
I inhale,
The dust scattered in the pale sunlight
shimmers like a cocktail dress,
Dreams like smoke
curl and linger,
a haze of aspiration and conspiracy.
Like sand hides a footprint,
the groove in my pillow disappears.
I exhale
and feel uncertain again.
Good morning.

*"I desire to speak somewhere without bounds,
like a man in a waking moment, to men in their waking moments."
-- Henry David Thoreau*

Musings

Walking in the autumn night is a disquieting experience. The wind blows leaves behind and around me. Sometimes a leaf drags scratching across the ground, as if some lamed stalker were pulling his bum leg behind him as he creeps behind me. Other times, a leaf will skip in the wind, and my invisible companion trips in the dark. I turn and look, but the wind makes the skeleton shadow of trees dance on the ground, and the shifting patter hides the following form. I laugh at myself, but what if, just once, I were to look behind me at the lonely expanse of sidewalk, back toward the parking lot, and see someone standing there, a silhouette against the orange glare of the mercury vapor lamps. A face, eyes, invisible in the dark, watching me walk. I'd take one faltering step backwards, maybe fall, the watching form would come closer, and then...

...And then I think about how many other students have walked (safely, most of the time) down this sidewalk. There's not a square inch of this campus that hasn't been walked on, ran over, crushed down, or felt someone's shoe trample it. That's how I feel sometimes when I try to write. There's not a plot line, a genre, a form, a character that hasn't been used in some manner. Even meta-fiction in all its bizarre promise is only fooling itself thinking it's doing something completely original. "This ground has been covered," my muse says as she packs up, closes the shutters, and leaves for the winter. "Sayonara, sweetheart."

But maybe I exaggerate. Maybe that mysterious figure watching me trip through the cold autumnal evening isn't some sinister stalker, but my *raison d'écriture*, my muse, unseen, disturbing, but waiting for some yet unknown signal to come to my rescue. I wish she'd hurry, because winter is coming, and soon it'll be too cold to walk alone at night.

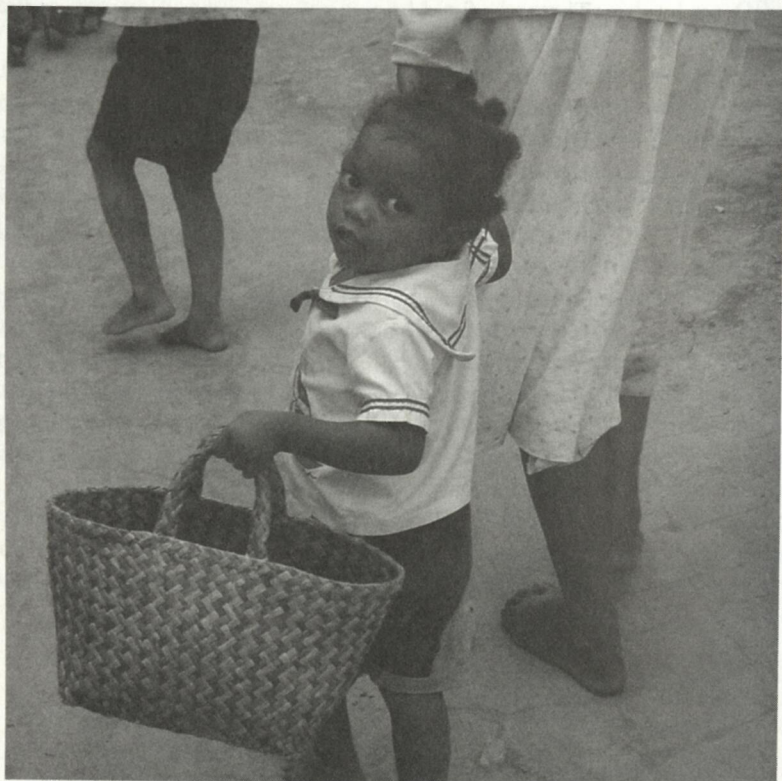
*"To rove about, musing, that is to say loitering, is, for a philosopher,
a good way of spending time." -- Victor Hugo*

Brother

The window almost broke,
And I almost wish
That your fist
Had completed its aim.
At least one thing you intended
Would have been fulfilled.
Blood would have trickled
Red-thick repulsive
From your hand
Instead of from your nose
When she knocked you down
In her fury though you were bigger.
Your eyes empty-angry
Wells of ink
As she slapped you
Over
And over.

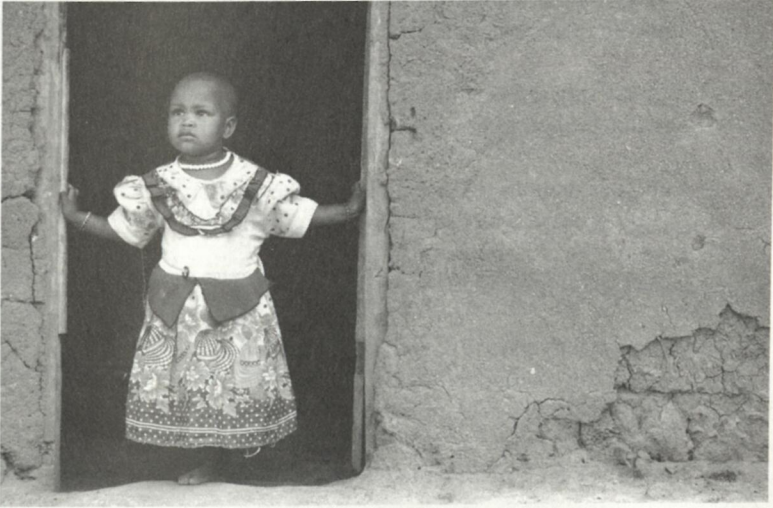
"That is the principal thing-- not to remain with the dream, with the intention, with the being-in-the-mood, but always forcibly to convert it into all things." -- Rainer Maria Rilke

Looking Back



"The highest vocation of photography is to explain man to man."
-- Susan Sontag

Unadulterated Ambivalence



*"Ambivalence is a wonderful tune to dance to.
It has a rhythm all its own." -- Erica Jong*

Travels

When they asked me where I had traveled, I gave
a rambling list of bold names from a map
to their quick exclamations of agreement.

But I didn't tell them about the sparkling snow
flying by the window of our midnight train
like an avalanche of stars in the dark sky

Or the tiny red tea cups on the yellow
counter, filled high with steaming hot chocolate

Or sour oranges that we picked in the green
leafy orchard under soft, golden sunlight
inside the crumbling castle on the hill
overlooking the blue Ionian sea

Or perfectly placed pews of brown ebony
under the soaring ceiling of St. Peter's
guarded by the cold, marble statues of saints
whose size made me feel like a child again
and long for a place called home.

*"The trail is the thing, not the end of the trail.
Travel too fast and you miss all you are traveling for."
-- Louis L'Amour*

Brussels Pantoum

Rome, Florence, Vienna...

Our minds molded by art, music, panoramic sunsets.

Past midnight, a lone sign now greets us: Brussels.

Off the train, bleary-eyed, ten hours since Berlin.

Our minds molded by art, music, panoramic sunsets,

We've already forgotten which city we're in.

Off the train, bleary-eyed, ten hours since Berlin.

Why did we come here?

We've already forgotten which city we're in.

We came for architecture, maybe some of that famous lace.

But why did we come here?

Oh yes, for waffles and savory, Belgian truffles.

We came for architecture, maybe some of that famous lace.

Instead, two prostitutes warn us to get off the streets; why did we come here?

Oh yes, for waffles and savory, Belgian truffles.

A prostitute gives directions, hurrying us to our hostel.

Two prostitutes warned us to get off the streets; why did we come here?

Just make it through the night,

Hurry to our hostel,

Ignore the homeless man's box-step.

We made it through the night!

Now find the tourist attractions,

Ignore another homeless man's box-step.

Why did we come here?

Finally, the tourist attractions;

A plaza with flowers, the one statue of a peeing boy, a waffle house.

Why did we come here?

Now touring a laundromat, we eagerly await Paris the next day... and wonder...

Why did we ever come here?

AUTHOR'S NOTE: A few years ago I backpacked around Europe for three weeks. Instead of writing about one of the amazing cities I visited, I wanted to write about one I disliked. So if you are ever traveling around Europe, just bypass Brussels. It will only end badly.

Wanderer



ARTIST'S NOTE: "Wanderer" was inspired by the story of the Irish famine.

Talking to Trees

The gravel road is dry and powdered with a fine yellow dust which puffs up with every step I take and coats the rubber toes of my sneakers. Noon sun bears down on my back; roadside trees cast no shadows at this hour, and the heat seeps into my already-browned skin. Loud orange tiger lilies, their throats filling with roadside dust, choke in the ditches, and I step among them, working my way down the embankment, probing the slope with my toes, clutching handfuls of stiff weeds to steady myself as I descend, my head now lower than the level of the road; I am disappearing into the underbrush.

A huge corrugated culvert pipe, which in spring carries the drain-off of the shallow creek from the left side of the road to the right, spilling in a waterfall that drops into this ravine, is, in the heat of summer, dry and silent. But it is near this spot that I stop, at a level piece of ground, grass brittle and baked. In the center of this clearing is a stump—my table for acorn cup tea parties with my doll; my chair for reading and re-reading *The Yearling*, *Adam of the Road*, *The Five Little Peppers and How They Grew*, *A Child's Garden of Verses*; my desk, where I can sit, my arms stretched to the elbow along its grainy surface, and dream of what I will be, of how far from this dusty road I will travel.

The road runs the other way, too. At the bottom of a small hill, it intersects with a county road which in summer oozes with tarry bubbles bursting under the pressure of bare feet, popping with each step. Another ditch to clamber over, a rusty, barbed wire fence to gingerly breach, and I am standing on top of a steep slope sown from selvedge to selvedge with spring flowers.

I know them all, because I carry with me almost daily my copy of *The Little Golden Book of Wildflowers*, have thumbed through its color-indexed pages and have found every one, have pressed a living specimen beside its delicately drawn counterpart. The names are as beautiful as the flowers themselves: spring beauties-- the most prolific flower here, spreading in sweeps across the woods, tiny blue veined blossoms collared in dark green leaves. Pinks, like an orange, both their color and their name. May apples, their spready clusters the largest of the flowers here. Indian tobacco, with their brushy grey-white stems,

AUTHOR'S NOTE: My writing is most heavily influenced by authors who value the spiritual world and find evidence of it in the natural world, like Thoreau, Dillard, and Dickinson. This piece is part of a book-length work (*Warren Peace-- get it?*) which is structured after Thoreau's *Walden*; in it, I celebrate nature's changing seasons, explore what I can learn about God and myself through nature, consider my identity as a woman through the roles that define me, and ponder the place writing has in my spiritual development.

smartweed with its purple, pebbly blooms. Sweet William, violets. My favorite is the trillium, its pointed burgundy flags splitting spotted leaves. Its slender stem arcs to offer, like a gift at my feet, its papery blossom. But its best gift is the poetry of its name: trillium, like the sound of birds high in trees, like the thrill of the flower's gentle brushings against my ankles. Trillium. A poem at my feet. Sprawling near a bed of them, their poetry leaks into my veins, their dark red blood infuses mine. Words drip from my fingers and my pencil is a stint that thrusts open the artery and lets them flow.

Up this high, the wind blows free. Branches wave, and the tree's very trunk rocks imperceptibly in a soundless rhythm. I squat and peer between the slats of my high-borne platform to the willow strands far, far below. Arcing from their branches, the strands sweep and sway, combing the grass, rustling the air currents. Late afternoon sun, low in the sky-- lower than I am-- glints in the oriental eyes of their slender leaves-- flashing, glimmering. My platform, only a wooden pallet nailed a bit askew between forking branches, is a porous jellyfish floating on the surface of air, willow fronds its tentacles trailing down into the unsubstantial blue. I am buoyant, borne aloft, and only air surrounds me. Wind ripples the edges of the notebook I clutch in my hand, but the words I have written remain embedded on the page, graphite ground into the fibers of what was once tree, words rooted as firmly as is this willow, yet words that, like it, can flex and dance and move with the spirit that sifts through these branches. The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. But I write on the currents of that spirit.

*I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;
Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honeybee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.*

Time passes without notice, wind through branches. It pulses without cessation, blood in veins, life-giving and welcome. Time accumulates, concentric rings from a point of origin, enlarging, strengthening the tree, becoming memory in a stump a young girl dreams upon. Desire remains, rooted, though time is not. It wanes and surges, an irregular heartbeat, but I carry it inside me. Now, settled and rooted myself, desire grows for a more permanent place to call my own. For years I cannot see it, but like Yeats, I can hear its call:

*I hear the water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavement gray,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.*

Overlooking a ravine, my writing cabin, now a reality, is deliberately located. Yeats' cabin was on the lake isle of Innisfree; Thoreau's was two miles from the village or

his nearest neighbor's, but I wanted mine to be not insular, but peninsular. Clearly visible from our house-- at least in bare branched months, before leaves enclose it-- it is only three hundred steps away from the life I live within those walls. But they are deliberate steps, steps which extend beyond the boundaries of our field-turned-yard with its coarse, wild-tufted grass, steps which enter an unpruned woods filled with walnut and maple, hawthorn and sycamore trees. A natural path cuts through the maples, and the ground is packed hard and studded with patches of tightly-knit moss. It curves down into a slight decline, the outlet for our pond, which we have spanned with wooden planks, now tilting wildly from several winter thaws. The path continues up, meandering through more trees that occasionally crack their brittle branches onto the trail. I must follow this circuituous path, for the pond cuts off direct access-- my steps must every time travel this transition from where I am wife, mother, housekeeper-- to this cabin, where I am nothing but a writer, where my hours are solitary and quiet, and are magnified by these.

Yet every time I take these three hundred steps, I am never sure what step it is that takes me into the woods and out of the parcel that is where I live. I sometimes see myself like the ballplayers in *Field of Dreams*, gradually dissolving into the woods as they melted into the corn. What marks the transition? Where does the real begin or end? I feel myself differently here, somehow. I am not isolated here, because from nearly any point in the woods, I can hear the sounds of my home-- children's calls and laughter, the barking dog, sounds of mowing and hammering and work are all breadcrumb trails I can follow back-- yet something internally alters when I am out of sight of home. I can almost always instantly retrieve a self that waits for me only here-- it is a kind of sloughing off of layers: the mother, the wife, the teacher, the respectable citizen are skins I step out of, and I am not naked without them. Something remains-- a woman who draws, who loves words, who is lost among trees, who prays soundlessly, who interprets everything.

Ahead of me is the cabin, situated on the edge of a ravine, another side to the peninsula, the most beautiful spot on our seventeen acres. As Thoreau observed about his own cabin, it was not long before I had worn a path to the door. I recognize in this the danger of which Thoreau warned: "The surface of the earth is soft and impressible by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn and dusty, then, must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity!" Yet the mind's paths can also lead to more positive ends, can with its repeated tracings confirm truth, embed a trail that is sure and solid and right. I feel this firmness in my steps, and all of nature justifies my way. In autumn especially, the ravine exults in praise, the trees flinging up their arms and raining down hallelujahs that float on spirit wind. I had originally cleared ground in a spot far more secluded, tangled in a thicket only accessible by hewn path, which year round would have held its secret. My husband urged me instead to this place, and now I know it could be nowhere else. The ravine spills into my cabin through six feet of window on my western side, and three feet of glass on the east links me to my home, where I can watch my youngest girls play in the grass with our dog Snickers or hear my son fire his potato cannon into the field or watch my oldest daughter as she stretches her legs out in front of her as she reads a book in an Adirondack chair.

This is where I should be. Looped in a skein which tethers me to my most necessary self yet reels out to connect me to unpeopled nature, the sloughing of seasons, the shifting of weathers, my cabin is a center which keeps either end from unraveling. When

I leave the woods, the sloughed selves rise up to greet me and I call myself blessed-- they are not burdens, not foreign garments: they are my skins and I love the layers that make up who I am, but I'm glad that the woods remind me that I am more than the roles I play, that there is a self that can talk to trees.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow.

It is late afternoon, deep in October, and I take the path through ankle-deep, noisy leaves that I've been taking for days. I am starting to know the scars and gouges of the paint-chipped old table in the woods beside my cabin, beginning to know its cracked slats and tilted seat that angles my vision into the ravine the table overlooks. I set my plaid Thermos on one end of the table, drop my notebook and pen on the other, and climb between the table and bench, one leg at a time.

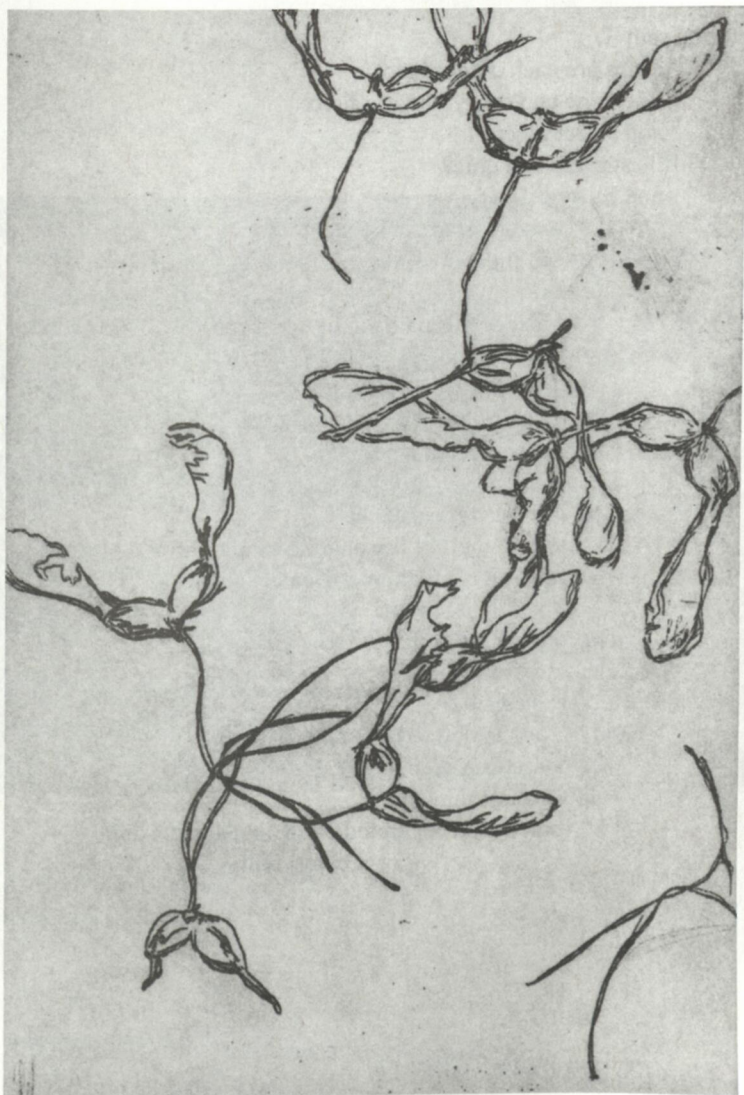
The sun's shadows are long, and the thin trunks of hickory and sycamore stripe the embankment, brown leaves still darker in the shadows. The air is pungent with the spicy odor of decay, the smell of chill, and I breathe it in, filling my lungs with its scent, exhaling staleness and indoor air.

This time of day has become my retreat, a period that lasts as long as my coffee does. I pour the first cupful always as soon as I sit down, the steam startlingly visible in the cooling air. The second cup comes after I am partially submerged in words, words that fill my notebook with surprising ease: there are few false starts, little agonizing over word choices, no hesitation in knowing what to write. For now, I am freed from my usual deliberateness in writing because I know no one will see what I write. Perhaps no words will ever leak from the pages of the notebook into print. Perhaps to everyone else this would be wasted effort and time.

But I experience it as a sort of heightened living, life keen and cutting, my senses alert to every crackling in the brush, my vision focused for the appearance of the squirrel that leans precariously on the edge of a rotted tree's stump and snaps its wiry tail, each snap punctuated by a chirp that I know must come from the squirrel's throat, though its mouth is clamped shut: just the tail, creating its own sound, whipping and cracking behind. How much of life goes on without a witness? How closed I have been to the smallest wonders.

The sun is just a bit above my eye level, washing coldly over my shoulders, spilling like weak tea over my table, as I pour the third and final cupful of coffee. This cup is sipped, my tongue mixing the coffee's flavor with the tang of the woodsy air. I am at home, and peace comes dropping slow.

Falling



"Falling leaves/ hide the path/ so quietly."

-- John Bailey, Autumn

Honest Rain

Arizona rain

 drops are each determined
 Each one and every one is a fierce
 and sweet touch

It is straight and quick
 and fully wet

 Arizona rain is like truth

 I have seen Indiana rain

 It blusters

 Each drop's path is not
 straight or quick

 They are half shaped
 and only half honest

Arizona earth talks and bears witness

Red old earth, un anciano,

 cracked and dried, it soaks in

 every drop to the smell of life and the saturation of a cleanse

 Arizona rain falls from higher Heaven clouds

 smelling at moments

 of alive water

There was a man named John.

 A man of the dust

 and I think he pointed and said

 There's the man who descends

 like honest rain and

 smells like saturated earth, and always did.

 Always will.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This poem was inspired at home in Arizona during the first summer rain. At the time I was reading from the gospel of John, and I found inspiration from John the Baptist's story and his testimony of the Messiah's coming.

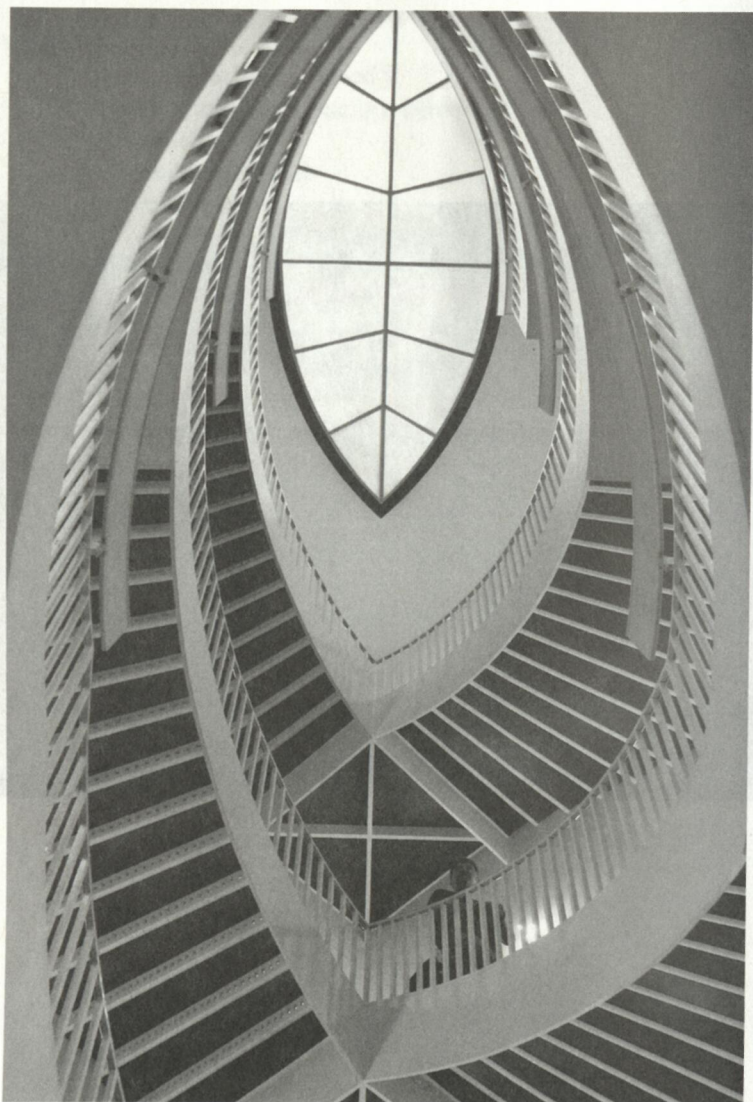
RACHEL BROWN

Elephant Crossing



*"If anyone wants to know what elephants are like, they are like people,
only more so." -- Peter Corneille*

Up Stairs



ARTIST'S NOTE: Coming out of the gift shop of the Contemporary Museum of Art in Chicago, I looked up before ascending the stairs. The crisp, bold contrast, strong symmetry, and intricately repetitious lines leading to the simple shape of the skylight made me stop and stare.

The Final Ascent



"Sunshine cannot bleach the snow, nor time unmake what poets know."
-- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Fitz

The room was dark except for the scattered candles, only giving enough light for my grandfather to see the silhouettes of my five cousins and I. The rain was falling heavily outside and the storm had knocked out the power. "Well children," my grandfather began, sitting down after lighting the last candle, "it seems as if we will be stuck like this for some time. I doubt the power will be fixed soon, what with the storm and all, so is there anything you would like to do to pass the time?" His eyes sparkled with expectancy, anticipating what he knew we would ask him to do.

My youngest cousin, Steven, who was no more than twelve that winter, blurted, "Tell us a story, Grampie."

My older cousin Brandon, seventeen and sure of himself, broke in, "Yeah, make it a long one. How about one of the stories you've always hinted at but say there isn't enough time to do it justice."

Thinking back on that day, none of us could have been more than eighteen years old, but our grandfather had a habit of treating us like we were more mature than our years. In his eyes we were on an equal footing with the students in the classes he taught at Amherst College. It was a special treat to hear him tell one of his stories because he was a published author and had been honored for his life's work earlier that day, which had been the reason for our visit. Though it was special to have him telling us a story, what made it more special was the reality behind the one Steven had asked for. According to our Grandfather and family tradition, this story was the story of our family's beginning: our personal legend.

"Alright," my grandfather said, amused. "It seems the time has come to pass on one of my favorites." As he settled himself down to tell the story, we made ourselves comfortable, knowing full well that our grandfather would not stop until he decided it was at a good place to do so.

And so, having settled into the soft armchair by the fire, our grandfather began his story.

"I tell you this tale as it was told to me so that it may live on in the hearts of our family as it has for generations. I have spent much of my life researching the details of this legend and have found little more than rumors except for the history which has been passed down in our family. However, that does not make it any less true; rather it just shows that we were entrusted with a responsibility to remember and pass it on to our children."

JUDGE'S COMMENTS: "Fitz" appropriately uses the story-within-a-story structure to draw in the reader. The setting is fully imaged and includes all the dirt and grime in its details. Fitz, our hero, is constantly on the move and engages in action, including well-choreographed fights. Never is the story static or short of entertainment.

Throughout history there have been stories told of men who have been deemed heroes, their legends passed down for generations. These men were ordinary people like you and I, who lived every day by the same rules that govern our lives. They were so ordinary that their deeds were even more spectacular; stimulating the phenomenon of *legacy*, the facet of immortality which causes the life and actions of one person to affect generations long after that person has passed away. This is the story of one such man. His name was Fitz.

Fitz is not a proper name. It was once the distinction given to the bastard children of noblemen, usually affixed to the front of the father's name, creating surnames like FitzWilliam or FitzMurphy. It was a method of segregating the "impure" blood of these base-born children from the pureblood of the nobles, still giving them a semblance of the respect they had a right to by being of noble lineage. Fitz received his name this way too. The difference with him is that he made this label *his* name.

Fitz was a man whose name fit him well. He looked like a fitz, someone who looks noble but has obvious common features which tell that he has no right to a title. His full name has been lost in the passage of time, but his description has always remained the same. He was tall, giving him an advantage in battle and any other physical exploit. He had a lithe, muscular build, typical of soldiers at the time who spent the better part of their lives running, riding horses, and practicing for hours with their weapons. He had hair like light syrup which framed eyes so pale blue as to be considered gray. His appearance was that of a man who has risen against the obstacles of status and made an officer in the military: severe. His face was hard and angular and he bore a scar across his right cheek, stretching from cheekbone to earlobe, a memento of his years of service. Still he retained the look of his father, a characteristic he regarded with disdain.

The exact year of his deeds has been lost like his true name, but one thing is still known for certain: the Kings' Crusade had ended and King Richard of England was the captive of the Duke of Austria. Fitz had traveled with his king to the Holy Land and proved himself worthy of his appointment as the leader of the rearguard. For you young ones who would not know what this position entails, it meant that Fitz was in charge of protecting everyone else as they escaped if they were attacked. The rearguard served as the wall behind which everyone else could retreat; they were the last ones out of danger. For someone who was of bastard birth, this was an immense honor. He lived to protect his king, and would have died to protect him had the situation ever called for it. However, when King Richard was imprisoned, Fitz, like many of the knights who had accompanied him on the crusade, was left without a lord or a means of returning to England. He became a wanderer.

He had nothing but his armaments and what supplies he had on his horse. Most of his fellow knights recanted their oaths of chivalry and became bandits or mercenaries. It is hard to say whether Fitz often turned to such measures, but the first account of his exploits declares him as "a soldier in well-worn armor, mounted on a rain-soaked roan." There are few accounts of the time he spent between the loss of his king and his first tale, but he made it point somehow and his sigil had already become well known in Austria.

Having completed his introduction, my grandfather surveyed the room, noting that some of my younger cousins were fidgeting and some of the others were obviously searching the room for something they could fix their minds on and still appear to be listening. As a rule, most speakers would have finished the story right there because they had lost their audience; my grandfather, however, lived by a different rule: if he still had the attention of one person in his audience, he would continue his story. His eyes met mine and he found the attention he needed to continue. "No doubt you can't wait for me to get to the story, but I find that some insight into Fitz's past will help in time. However, as I see that some of you are beginning to allow your untrained attentions to wander, I shall tell the first of Fitz's tales."

THE FIRST GLIMPSE

It was near nightfall when Fitz rode into the town he had been told was a day's ride east of Austria's western border. He needed food, water, rest, and a decent stable for his horse, but first he needed to pay his respects to the town's lord. Fitz, being as tired as he was, tried to remember why this was such an important thing to do. His memory lit upon a time from the beginning of his lonely journey. That visit had not gone as well as he had liked. King Richard had been recently captured and the peasantry and minor nobles had feared one of his knights, armed and geared for war, meant to exact revenge on them for the loss of a king. They had driven him from town with rocks and pitchforks, cursing him as he went. By making it a habit to visit the lord of the town and announce his intentions before finding an inn to stay at, Fitz had avoided any similar experiences.

It seemed a long ride to the town's palisade, though it could not had been more than four hundred yards to the end of town. As he approached, Fitz decided that the term palisade was a compliment to the structure. It had a wall around it of wooden stakes cemented together with mud, and the only entrance was a narrow breach in the wall. It stood at the top of a slight rise and was only three floors tall. The breach was only guarded by two extremely lazy-looking guards who only gave him a cursory glance before motioning him to enter. Fitz suspected they were both deep in their cups from their swaying motions and bloodshot eyes. In this state he doubted they could have recognized a tavern wench from a tree even as she flaunted her wares.

He shook his head as he entered the yard and allowed a stable boy to take his horse from him. While walking to the palisade's front entrance, Fitz permitted himself a look around the yard at the soldiers, stable hands, and blacksmith going about their daily business. The stable hands and blacksmith seemed to be performing their tasks adequately and Fitz told himself to remember to visit the blacksmith if he could before leaving the town. The soldiers were a different story. They were performing the tasks which soldiers daily had to do, sparring, checking their weapons and armor for signs of excessive wear, and patrolling the palisade. None of them, however, was doing so in a manner which Fitz considered martial. *Humph*, he thought with contempt, *they are lazy and unprepared. If this town were attacked they would be the first to run.* His disdain for such inadequacy

must have been more apparent on his face than he thought, because when he entered the palisade, he was met by a scowling man, the fort's chamberlain.

"Who are you?" The chamberlain's voice was deep and gruff, surprising from a man who only came to Fitz's chest and looked more scholar than soldier. "I am chamberlain of this fort and I know everyone who has business with my lord. You I do not recognize. State your business, or leave."

Not the reception I was hoping for, Fitz thought. He bowed to the chamberlain but bent as little as possible without seeming rude and smoothed his face, hoping to sway the man with respect while showing him he was speaking to his better. "My apologies. I am Fitz, a knight who has found himself stranded in this country. I have come to pay my respects to the lord of this area and assure him of my good will." Though the chamberlain seemed mollified, Fitz still sensed some hesitation, so he continued, switching tactics, "I have ridden long today. May I have an audience with the lord of this fort, or must I stand in his hall like a beggar before finding my bed tonight?"

The sudden change in attitude startled the chamberlain into submission, and, though it was submission through fear of rebuke, Fitz was too tired to offer any further explanation or apology for his rudeness. He was led down a hallway and up two remarkably well-decorated staircases before he was left to wait outside an iron-banded oak door while the chamberlain announced him to the lord of the fort. To his satisfaction, he did not have to wait long before the chamberlain stuck his head out of the door and motioned him to enter.

The sight that met Fitz as he entered the lord's study was far from what he had expected. The walls were hung with rich tapestries, the rug on the floor was patterned to match the lord's sigil, and there were many lamps hung throughout the room which brought the light of noon to a world of dusk. The most astonishing part of the whole scene though, was the man sitting behind the ornately-carved desk. It was Lorn, a fellow knight who had traveled with King Richard on the Crusades. He berated himself. *I really should have known. The sigil hasn't changed that much and the bloody chamberlain was speaking to me in English. Still it is surprising to find Lorn here. I thought him either dead or gone from Austria by now. This might prove to be a peaceful stay after all.*

He was wrong.

"Lorn, I thought you dead--"

Lorn rose from behind his desk, drawing his full height into a rigid, muscular tower. He was smiling, though his eyes were burning and held no sense of friendship. "You! It is *Lord* Lorn now. What are you doing here? Come to take my town from me next, have you? Found out I had achieved something and wanted to take it for yourself? Wasn't it enough for you to take my position as Commander of the Rear Guard? You, a bastard! What in the name of God was Richard thinking? You..."

"That is *King* Richard. He is still your liege lord even if you have forgotten it," Fitz interrupted heatedly. "I have not come for anything from you, nor did I ever have any desire for your position in King Richard's army, only serving where I was placed. Keep this village. I hope you enjoy making it your own little outpost. All I want is a place to sleep for the night and to tell you I intend you no harm." His look was placating but there was anger in him which few would have guessed. Lorn's use of King Richard's name without a title declared him as a traitor, one of those who had forsworn their oaths out of fear. To Fitz,

Lorn was the epitome of a craven and he loathed him for it.

"One night Fitz. I'll allow you one night in the inn. However, if you are not gone from this town by afternoon tomorrow..." he paused, leaving the threat unsaid and letting a familiar smile spread across his face; smile which meant volumes to one who had served with him in the Crusades-- a violent death.

"You have my thanks, Lord Lorn, and my promise. I will be gone from here by afternoon tomorrow." Fitz bowed to leave and made it to the door before Lorn stopped him.

"One last thing, Fitz. I want your word you will avoid trouble while you stay here. Should anything happen tonight which is... unusual, I will come for you." Once more the smile crept across his face.

Fitz knew it was a trap. He would have known it had he been blind and nearly deaf, but he was also a man of honor, and a lord, no matter how foolish, had just asked for his word. Looking Lorn directly in the eyes he responded, "Lorn, you have my word of honor that I will neither start nor seek any trouble as long as I stay here." The outrage on Lorn's face due to Fitz purposeful omission of his title would have made Fitz laugh had he dared a further insult, but before Lorn had a chance to react, Fitz made his way out of the palisade.

Fitz reflected on his meeting with Lorn as he walked. *There was I time I might have considered Lorn a friend. We were not too different in the beginning, both having earned through many hardships and long years the ranks we had been given. The crusade changed him though, made him cruel and rash. King Richard did everything he could to place him where he was best suited, but each reassignment brought out more resentment from Lorn. In truth, he was one of the best soldiers in our force, but his undisciplined nature made him a difficult ally to rely on. I wonder how he would be treating me now had I not tried to defend him. I have always suspected he took it as an insult. Oh well, what's done is done.*

Retrieving his horse from the stables, Fitz made his way back to the inn, the day fading around him. He overpaid so he could have a private room with a clean mattress and special care taken for his horse. A trip to the kitchens yielded a dinner and the promise of provisions early the following morning. Fitz decided to sit in the common room and absorb the local news for a while before getting some rest.

It was dark and crowded, and there was a haze of smoke obscuring the ceiling. A man who had no business singing was leading the room in a bawdy song about a bride on her wedding night. Fitz took a seat by the wall at an empty table and ordered brandy, the only drink he had ever enjoyed. The song ended with the singer falling from the table face first into one of the serving girls. Under the cover of the peal of raucous laughter, a newcomer snuck into the room, unseen and ignored by all but Fitz, who noticed the accented bulge of his tunic, which signified hidden scale mail and a castle-forged short-sword on his hip.

So, I was not mistaken. Lorn wants me dead after all these years and has sent one of his men to do the job. He still doesn't have the stones to dirty his own hands; it's no wonder King Richard chose to entrust his safety to me rather than that buffoon. Still... they are earlier than I would have thought. Best I keep a wary eye out tonight.

Fitz remained in the common room long enough to not let on that he had noted

the man and regarded him as a threat. When he left, it was with the appearance of a man who had drunk more than his fill, and was secretly pleased to see a smirk of satisfaction on the stranger's face because of the act. He made his way to his room and made preparations for a difficult night. He stuffed his pillows under the bedclothes to make it appear he had fallen asleep and he left the door slightly ajar in the facade of drunken neglect. Fitz hid, placing himself in a nook between the bed and dresser, shrouded by a deep shadow where he could observe the door while being difficult to see from outside, and readied himself for his watch.

It is always the waiting that is hardest in circumstances like these. The fighting he could take; the anticipation of a coming fight was unbearable. Fitz's nerves were strung tight in the effort to keep his senses as sharp and alert as possible. His thoughts wandered due to fatigue and would light upon his past, the crusades, Lorn, and even his own childhood before he reined them back in, focusing his mind again on the task at hand.

Several hours before dawn, that time when the sky is beginning to lighten on the horizons but no true light of day has yet reached the world, Fitz heard the whisper of muted feet in the hall outside his door and reflexively loosened his knife in its sheath, knowing his sword was nearly useless in the small confines of the room. The door creaked open, spilling a wedge of wavering light into the room. *How stupid are these people? Who brings a light to an assassination?* Setting aside his critique of his adversaries' methods, Fitz resumed his watch.

To his surprise, it was not an assassin that came to his room, nor was it even a man; rather it was the serving girl who had brought his drinks in the common room. She ghosted toward the bed and gently nudged the form she found there. When it did not stir, she nudged it again more forcefully, but in doing so she upset the covers and saw that it was only the pillows. She would have screamed when Fitz emerged from his hiding place had it not been for his hand over her mouth and his blade at her throat as he grabbed her. "What do you want?" he breathed to her ear. "Why are you here so late at night? I will remove my hand if you promise not to scream. Nod your head if you promise."

She nodded and he slowly removed his hand from her mouth, but kept the knife where it was. "Please sa, I was asked ta come and fetch ye. Ye're summoned ta the fort by Lord Lorn. He requests yer presence immediately." She spoke quietly, keeping her voice low, barely more than a whisper, but the urgency she obviously felt was plain to hear.

"What is this? Why have I been summoned?" As he spoke, Fitz jerked her head as a way of showing her he wanted answers now, and truthfully.

"I donno know, sa. I've spoken as I were told. Please donno hert me."

Fitz knew she was telling the truth, but that did not mean that he liked the situation any less. He released the girl and she slumped to the floor, checking her neck for any cuts. *Honestly, I was holding the flat to your throat, girl. Do you really think there is a blade that is that wide? Perhaps I should have held the blade to your throat so you would understand the difference. No, it is no more her fault than your caution is yours. Lorn is the one behind this.*

The wicked smile which spread across his face must have frightened the poor girl because she squeaked and backed further away from him. "Go, girl. I have no quarrel with you. Get yourself to your own chambers and secure your door. This night is no place for wondering fancies." As she scurried from the room, Fitz buckled his sword belt to his waist

and checked to see if his armor was secured, then he too left the room.

Leaving the inn, he was met by a four-man squad of guardsmen. They had his horse saddled and prepared for him, so he took it and allowed himself to be escorted to the fort. Upon entering the palisade, Fitz was led to not to Lorn's study, but to a more central location. The large double doors his escort stopped him in front of seemed to lead to some large meeting hall. Instantly, his mind made the connection. Lorn's words from their earlier encounter suddenly reverberated in his head, "Should anything happen tonight which is ... unusual, I will come for you." Lorn had sent the man in the common room to spy on him, make sure he had gone to bed, preferably drunk, and commit some crime while making it look like Fitz had been the one responsible. He was to be charged with some crime, and would most likely be found unnecessarily guilty. *But why have my hands not been bound or my weapons take from me?* Fitz mused.

He lost track of time waiting to be ushered into the meeting hall. When he was admitted Fitz was surprised to see a man standing on the defendant's block. *So, I will have to wait before I am tried, he thought to himself.* He was mistaken.

Lorn was seated in an ornately-carved chair on the platform which served as the dais. He looked as if he dreaded something that was happening, but kept his gaze intently on Fitz. He was led directly to the dais and presented before Lorn. "Welcome, Sir Fitz, to my court, such as it is. I find myself in an unpleasant position. On one hand I despise you and regret allowing you to stay in my town, but on the other I have an innocent man on trial for thievery. There is no one who will stand in his defense. Without an intervention I will be forced to find him guilty. He is my personally-appointed tailor and thus cannot afford to lose a hand as punishment for this crime."

Fitz interrupted him before he could continue. "How are you so sure he is innocent? It seems that all evidence points to him being guilty. What are you not telling me?"

"He is charged with the theft of a brace of daggers from one of my guardsmen. The guardman is well known by me to be slack in his duties and a liar; however, as no one will offer any evidence to contradict him, including my tailor, I have no choice but to find the tailor guilty. What I want from you is to convince him to demand a trial by combat with you as his champion."

"Why should I help you, Lorn? I would hate to see an innocent man punished, but what do I gain from helping you?" He knew he was going to help the man, and by the look on Lorn's face so did he, but there was no harm in trying to see if he could gain something from this.

"You will get free use of the castle armory and will be allowed to renew your provisions from the castle larder."

"As you wish, so long as this enmity between us is ended here and now. I have never harbored any ill will against you."

"When you leave you may go in peace, but should we meet in battle there will be no kinship or leniency on my part. Now go save this man's livelihood."

Fitz turned without answering and walked to the man on trial. "My name is Fitz, a traveling knight. If you wish it, I will champion you in a trial by combat at the behest of your lord."

"But why defend me, sir? By the decision of this court I am guilty." His fear was obvious up close. He was sweating and his pants bore the damp signs of having lost control

of his bladder.

"Lord Lorn knows you are innocent and he knows the man accusing you is a liar. It would only take one testimony in your defense for him to dismiss it completely, but as none has shown itself I have been asked to prove your innocence in another fashion. Will you accept my help?"

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir." The man seemed overcome with relief, though Fitz could not discern if it were for his help or Lorn's faith in his tailor. Either way, there was going to be a fight; Fitz had to make it look convincingly difficult for the crowd.

"Make your decision known to the court. You will be a free man soon enough."

Fitz took his position at the man's left as he made his plea. "My lord, I am innocent." His voice shook at first but steadied as he went on. "I would have my innocence proven through trial by combat, but I am no fighter, my lord, as all know. This man here, Sir Fitz, has graciously offered to fight on my behalf as my champion, should my lord allow it."

Lorn looked from the man to his guardsman before nodding his head in acceptance. "The trial by combat will be held at third watch. Combatants, use this time to prepare yourselves." Lorn rose and descended the dais, leaving the room and allowing no time for the guardsman to object.

Fitz used the time it took for the tailor to compose himself to leave the chamber to study his opponent. Lorn had said he was lazy, but he appeared well-muscled and likely to be comfortable with his weapon. The axe which hung from a loop in his belt told volumes about the man; it made him a brawler. He was someone who could neither control himself in combat nor had the finesse to use a sword effectively. Fitz smiled to himself. *Not entirely unlike myself when I was younger. He will be unpredictable but will expose himself to my attacks so long as I am able to keep him far enough away from me to use my bastard sword effectively. I think I might actually enjoy this fight.*

Fitz left the chamber with the tailor, trying to ignore the man's overwhelming need to thank him. When they exited the palisade, Fitz took his leave to prepare himself for the fight, which consisted of stretching and making sure his hand-and-a-half sword had a keen edge. Fortunately, he did not have to wait long for the fight as it was already nearing the end of second watch when the trial had concluded.

Lorn had commanded a chair to be placed at the head of the stairs for him to oversee the fight, but before he called for it to begin he walked over to where Fitz was waiting. "Fitz, kill him if you can. He may be my guardsman but he has disgraced himself by accusing an innocent man of theft. He must die. Oh, and if you were planning on being noble and sparing his life I'll have him killed for his false accusations anyways. The best you can do for him is to give him an honorable death." He strode to his seat and called for the attention of those who had gathered to watch the fight.

"My people, today we will bear witness to a trial by combat. Eggard the tailor will be championed by Sir Fitz and Guardsman Jalen will fight for himself. Whenever the combatants are ready, the fight shall begin." Fitz moved into the circle the crowd had created, unsheathed his sword, and threw the scabbard to the tailor. The guardsman, Jalen, was more hesitant to enter the circle. When he entered, reluctance was plain in his body language. His axe was newly-sharpened and the edge held a wicked gleam. Fitz knew that axe could shear bone with a single stroke.

The armor he wore seemed more suited to an ancient Roman gladiator than a medieval soldier. It consisted mainly of chain mail; however, there were large metal plates fastened to his left arm and leg, effectively making that side of his body impenetrable. His right side was relatively unarmored, offering only minimal protection. To Fitz's well-trained eye, this meant that he favored his left side and knew he was not very fast so he compensated by reducing the weight of his armor in what he deemed as non-crucial areas. It also confirmed Fitz's earlier assessment of him: Jalen was a brawler and would use the strength of his armor to whatever advantage he could find or make.

Fitz had been so absorbed in studying his opponent that he failed to hear when Lorn announced the match could begin. He was not caught off-guard; instead he reacted to the guardsman's movements.

The initial strike came low and fast, followed by a savage shoulder ram which knocked Fitz back a step. He countered with a swift thrust to the midsection and nearly lost his footing when Jalen ducked under it and aimed a kick at his leg. Fitz backed away in time to avoid the follow-up slash that would have opened his gut. The man was much quicker than he looked and Fitz was beginning to regret not sleeping during the night, but his adrenaline was pumping and his battle reflexes were very awake.

Circling to his right, Fitz launched an attack of his own. It began with a feinted one-handed lunge and was quickly followed by a spin of his sword using the momentum of the blade, finally turning into a downward slash, raising sparks off of Jalen's shoulder plating as he narrowly dodged it. Before he could recover, Fitz changed to a two-handed grip, using the extra power of leverage to connect a horizontal slash solidly to Jalen's side. Unfortunately, the extra defense caused by the plating was enough to absorb most of the impact, preventing the sword's blade from cutting him but not stopping the force of the blow from driving the breath from him and cracking at least one rib. The crowd cheered, loving every minute of it. *Well, you never can guess how much the people will enjoy the brutality one man can inflict on another*, Fitz had time to wonder in the midst of combat.

As the man staggered back, eyes bulging as he fought to draw air into his lungs, Fitz pressed his advantage. A high thrust caught Jalen across the right shoulder with enough force to rend the chain mail and bite into the meat of his arm. It was enough to cause his parry of the next slash at his exposed right side to barely maneuver the big blade wide of its mark. The mistake cost him the fight, as Fitz quickly followed up with a thrust into Jalen's inner thigh, causing him to fall to the ground with a scream.

As Fitz pulled his blade from his opponent's leg he knew the fight was over. He had pierced the femoral artery. Fitz guessed Jalen had twenty seconds to live; he was wrong: it only took fifteen. Looking down at the corpse of his fallen opponent lying in the growing red stain of its own blood, Fitz was overcome with the idiocy of the whole event. *What was it he was trying to prove? Was it that he was trying to get away with something? He could not have thought he could best a knight who has survived the Crusades. Whatever may have been his reason, he fought well and bravely.* Fitz knelt by the body, head bowed, sword point in the ground, and his hands on the hilts of his sword. *Lord in Heaven, accept this man's soul into your keeping. In life he fought to protect his lord and he sinned. Let him in death find rest from his watch and absolution from his sins. In all things let Your will be done as it was in the beginning. Amen.*

A hand on his shoulder brought back his awareness of his surroundings. The hand

belonged to the tailor, Eggard; Lorn stood at his shoulder. "Thank you for saving me. I would have lost a hand had it not been for you. What can I ever--"

"Leave Sir Fitz to his prayers, Eggard. It is his habit, if I recall, to pray for the souls of his fallen foes." The look in his eyes showed he was annoyed that Fitz had retained his religious fervor and respect for the dead.

"Yes, Milord. Sir Fitz, please stop by my shop before you leave town. There is something I would discuss with you." Eggard turned and exited the palisade, heading back to town a free man.

It was then, watching him go, that Fitz was able to reconcile himself with the death he had just caused. The price had been paid. One man had died so another could continue living his; such is martial justice. He turned to confront Lorn. "Did that satisfy your need for blood? Or should I have removed his head?"

"You gave him the soldier's death he never deserved, quick and clean. You aren't half bad when I get to watch you without fearing for my own position. I'd offer you a commission if I thought you could stand serving under the likes of me. You did me a good thing today, Fitz, and I'll stay true to our bargain. You have free use of my blacksmith, larder, and kitchen staff; the order has already been passed around. Farewell, Fitz, and may we never meet again."

"Answer me one question first. The man at the inn, why did you send him?"

"I sent him to ensure you didn't get into any trouble, to keep an eye on you. Is that enough of an answer for you?" At Fitz's nod he stalked off into the keep, a man who could not truly decide what he felt anymore.

Fitz stayed by the body until men came to bear it away and the dust had begun to try and reclaim its natural dun from the blood-soaked patch where Jalen had died. He visited the blacksmith first, knowing from experience that any work done there would take most of the day. His armor needed mending and his sword had been notched in the fight, so they were handed over with enough coin for half the work and the promise of the rest once it was completed. The kitchens greeted him with a tantalizing aroma of freshly-baked rolls. He helped himself to breakfast while waiting for his provisions to be made ready, savoring the rarity of castle food while he could.

When he checked back at the blacksmith he was told his equipment would not be ready until after lunch, as the steel was stronger than the smith had anticipated. Fitz took the opportunity to look around the yard and see to the care of his horse. His circuit around the courtyard did not take long, and all was in order with his horse, so he took the time to get some sleep in the stable.

After lunch, Fitz retrieved his armor from the blacksmith, paying the rest of what he owed him and complimenting him on the work he had done before leaving the palisade. He was about to leave town when he remembered that he had promised to visit the tailor before he left and turned his horse back toward town. What he found at the tailor's shop was surprising, but that is a tale for another time.

With a blinding flash the power came back on, bringing the lights back to life with

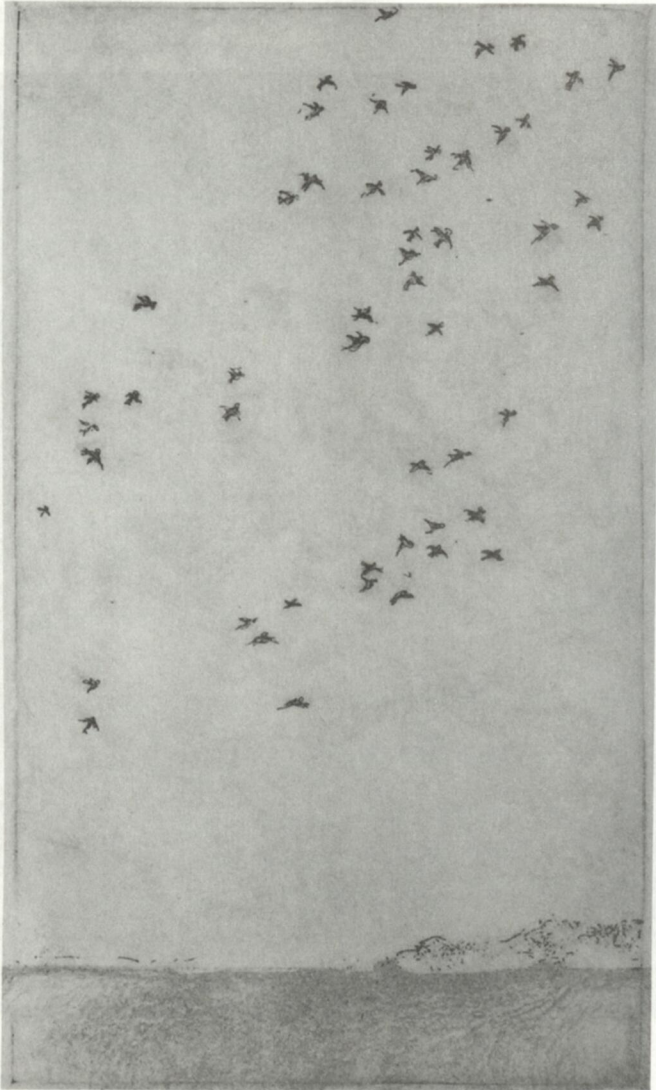
it. A collective groan went up from my cousins and me at the realization that it probably meant the end of the story. Without hesitation, I got up, walked to the breaker box in the kitchen and cut main power, sending the house once more into darkness. The looks of appreciation in my cousins' eyes made me smile, but it was the genuine and heartfelt look of love and joy on my grandfather's face that drove me blushing back to my spot on the floor. I was thankful for the dim lighting, but I still could not help but mumble something about the ground outside still being too wet outside for the younger ones to play anyways. Smiling, my grandfather continued his story.

Princess Albert de Broglie



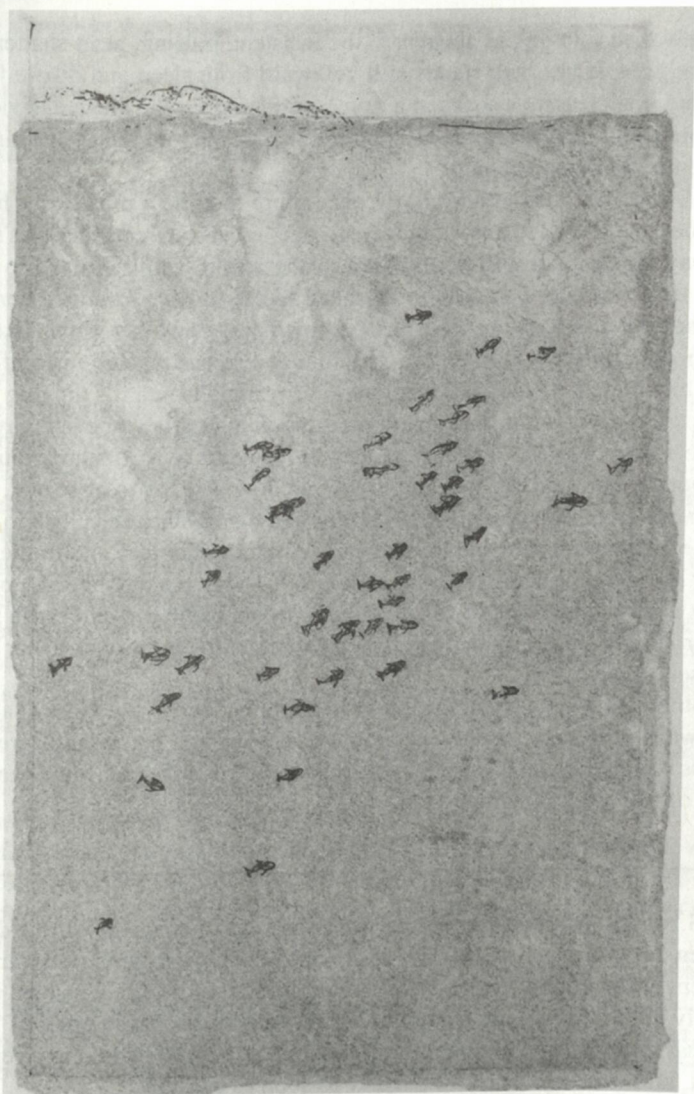
"It is not merely the likeness which is precious... but the association and the sense of nearness involved in the thing... the fact of the very shadow of the person lying there fixed forever! It is the very sanctification of portraits, I think." -- Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sky



ARTIST'S NOTE: The process of etching involves drawing an image onto the surface of a coated zinc plate, exposing the metal underneath...

Water



...The plate is then dropped into acid, which eats away at the lines of the image. Ink can then be rubbed into the resulting grooves and printed onto damp paper using a press.

An Exercise in Fortune-Telling

She awakens slowly, as always, to the insistent, pulsing, head-shattering alarm of the clock at the foot of her bed. Hands still awkward from sleep and disuse fumble about as uselessly and gracelessly as socks in a dryer, searching for the elusive device, knocking papers and books and odds and ends off the bedside table before finally locating and quelling the unrelentingly harsh beeping.

She buries her face in her pillow once more to stifle a moan. Her head is going to explode, she just knows it, and whatever strange, cruel-natured thing that's relentlessly pounding away inside of it will be exposed to the world, and will have to find another place to take up residence. The ache in her head seems to have saturated her entire body, centering in her gut and weaving tendrils of unsteadiness down her limbs, like vines on an oak tree or morning glories on a trellis, crippling and restrictive and uncomfortably invasive. It feels like there's a black hole centered in her middle, and it's tugging insistently at something in the back of her throat, making it difficult to swallow or even draw breath. She feels as if she's made of glass, and any sudden movements or particularly loud noises will shatter her; but she can't be like that, not today, not now. She has to be strong, has to put on the smiling mask and the happy-go-lucky armor and the lighthearted cloak to hide her true condition, the brittle porcelain and insubstantial crystal of her face and frame.

Get up, she tells herself. *Get up and move*. Today is a day like any other, and just as if it really is any other day she has to stumble to the bathroom and brush her teeth and dig her hairbrush out of the jumbled mess on her dresser to play its part in her daily attempt to make herself presentable.

Clothes are next-- a shirt dragged from its hanger in the closet paired with the jeans she'd worn yesterday, but no one would notice, and no one would care, and at least with the jeans whichever top it was that she's just pulled over her head and shoved her arms into and out of was sure to match.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: My younger brother was born with a congenital heart defect; he had surgery when he was three weeks old, and had to have more surgery several years ago. When he went in for a check-up this year, things didn't look so good, and we were told that he'd probably have to have surgery again, likely sometime in the summer of '07. They did more tests just to double-check things, and apparently realized that things were worse than they thought, and that he needed the surgery as soon as possible.

He's sixteen years old.

The surgery went well, though he'll almost certainly need more eventually. Originally my family was thinking that I would not be able to be there for it, and I didn't like that idea at all. This essay was how I projected that I'd feel if it had ended up that I wasn't allowed to be there when the day came for him to have his operation.

Food... breakfast... but her mouth sours and her stomach shrivels up like a slug in a saltcellar at the mere thought of food, and she knows with absolute certainty that today is one day that she can't force herself to eat.

Because it's today, and today is the worst day of her life.

She should *be* there. She *should* be there. *She should be there.*

That single sentence with all the possible intonations, all of them equally true, runs through her mind as regularly as the Underground on the Circle Line in London, stopping every two minutes or so at Bayswater before shooting off along dimly-lit tracks to Notting Gate and High Street Kensington and twenty-three other stops before rattling into Paddington Station and then Bayswater all over again.

She should be there.

But she isn't there, and that's why things start to get blurry, like looking through a windshield when it's snowing and the flakes turn to water as soon as they hit the glass, but while they're in the air and you're driving into them-- it always seems like you're driving into them somehow-- the headlights reflect off them, blinding you with the power of the thousands upon thousands of tiny mirrors that are orchestrated just so to compose each flake and mesmerizing you with their crazy, constant, chaotic motion, flitting about like fragile, colorless insects.

Nothing really seems to matter, nothing anyone says or does really registers, nothing exists except the insistent gnawing of worry in the pit of her stomach.

A few hours later, she thinks that surely that worry must have chewed straight through her stomach and moved on to her other internal organs, because she feels so very hollow, as if she could be cracked like an egg and easily pried in two, though nothing but dust and a little blood and maybe the worry itself would come dripping out.

She's had her phone beside her the whole day, which is unusual, and she's taken to staring at it-- it's the only thing that she really seems capable of seeing at this point, the only thing that has any color, and she is fixed on it as surely as Polaris is fixed in the northern sky. *Would they call me*, she wonders, *would they call me if something went wrong? How long would they wait before letting me know?* And so she stares at her orange-and-grey cased lifeline steadily, watching with flat, clouded eyes as the minutes slowly slide through the digital clock on the phone's darkened screen.

She is alone in this world of unclear edges and smeared windows today; no one really knows what's going on because she didn't tell them-- and what good would it do anyway? They couldn't do anything about any of it, couldn't change anything; they would just cluster about her to pat and paw and ask uncomfortable questions with responses that they don't really care to hear, and she doesn't have the answers to anyway, questions that let them sound concerned without forcing them to really care about anything at all.

And so she fidgets and waits and sits through lectures without really hearing a single word that any of the professors say, because those four words of her own selection block them all out more effectively than earplugs or headphones or anything of the like

ever could:

I should be there.

She had been there last time, and she had been useless, only able to stand and watch, mouth and face and intestines and heart twisting in absolute misery as the gurney was wheeled away through the swinging doors and as her mother curled into her father's comforting embrace, crying helplessly in a manner that was horribly un-adult, distressingly vulnerable and un-parent-like. It had shaken her to see it. But at least she was there. At least she was there.

This is it, actually, she realizes. This is why she tries so hard to hold others at an arm's length, if she even allows them that close. She simply cares too much, has too much depth of feeling for feeling to be healthy, and so she keeps herself isolated, immersing herself in countless little make-believe worlds of her own choosing, because it doesn't really matter if she forms attachments to those characters-- they have a separate existence, and possess a certain type of immortality that people in The Real World are lacking of entirely. Even death, the final curtain that signals the end of a living being's earthly performance, cannot truly kill them; rewind the tape, flip back a few pages, press the reverse arrow, and they live again, each one a Lazarus in their own right, a phoenix that crumbles to ash only to rise again in their fully glory each time the story begins anew.

Humans are not so indestructible. They cannot be hung onto, cannot be brought back with the fanning of pages or the sharp click of a button.

They change.

They grow.

They die.

And that cannot be changed or prevented or avoided, just ignored and delayed and forcefully forgotten until a stronger force shoves it in your face and reminds you that life is fleeting and insubstantial and can vanish in the space between two heartbeats.

But heartbeats are the last thing she wants to be thinking about now.

She wants her phone to ring, to signal the "all's clear"; she wants to know that everything is alright and that her life can go on the same way as it has for twenty-one years now, with the cast of characters fully intact.

But in this world, there can be no certainties, no promises, no way to flip to the last page to make sure that everyone will get through to the ending, or that the ending will be a happy one.

Big brothers are supposed to be the protective ones-- they get all the press. No one talks about big sisters as being particularly protective, but it's no less true, especially when the sister is a tomboy who grew up playing rough-and-tumble with the very brother she's now defending. Five years younger, and nearly a foot taller, and he's still her "baby brother." He always will be. And no one-- no one-- is allowed to mess with her baby brother: No one is allowed to hurt him or make fun of him except for her; if they do-- they're toast-- buttered, jellied, and served with orange juice and a side of bacon and eggs, scrambled or over-easy, diner's choice.

She's never actually had to fight for him before, though she knows with absolute

certainly that she would do it without a second thought-- anything to protect one of her most precious people.

But this is something she can't fight off, as much as she'd like to. There is no getting around it, no denying it, and she knows that all she can do is be there for him, to stay by his side in The Real World instead of retreating back into one of her many worlds of escape where it's safe.

But she can't even do that; every instinct insists, every part of her body screams that she should be there, but she isn't.

And somehow she still has to pretend that she's alright, even though she's never been farther from it in her life.

The Chess Game

A boy and his father
set out to play
what seemed to happen every rainy day.
The box was taken out
and the table cleared
The checked world unfolded
and your men placed here.
Soon the king marched out with his queen in hand,
their knights standing proudly on horses quite grand.
Then the bishops went ahead to clear God's way,
and the rooks took their corners,
anchoring the display.
The men growled at the opposing army,
preparing to march and to make them sorry
But their king said nay,
first white must go,
and then, in time, black will overthrow.
So they reluctantly held their positions
as the older king advanced
and then with a hit of the clock
they began to dance!
A battle cry arose
and there were slain on both sides
but it seemed to be vain
until a knight broke the lines
He threatened the king with the point of his spear,
"Check," he said, with a bit of a sneer
and by the tick, he menaced near!
But that mustn't happen,
Not while *she* was around!
And with a kiss,
the queen left her king's crown.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The inspiration for this poem came from my grandpa, whose favorite things growing up were playing soccer and chess. His father taught him the game on many a rainy day, and even today, my father has the chess box they played with. Therefore, this poem is dedicated to him, and to Alfansie Henn, his father, who taught the game of chess as well as he lived out his wise words.

With a heart full of love,
She moved every way,
Rallying the troops,
getting in harm's way.

A few slaps later,
she had the upper hand,
the older king in refuge,
the offense soundly tanned.

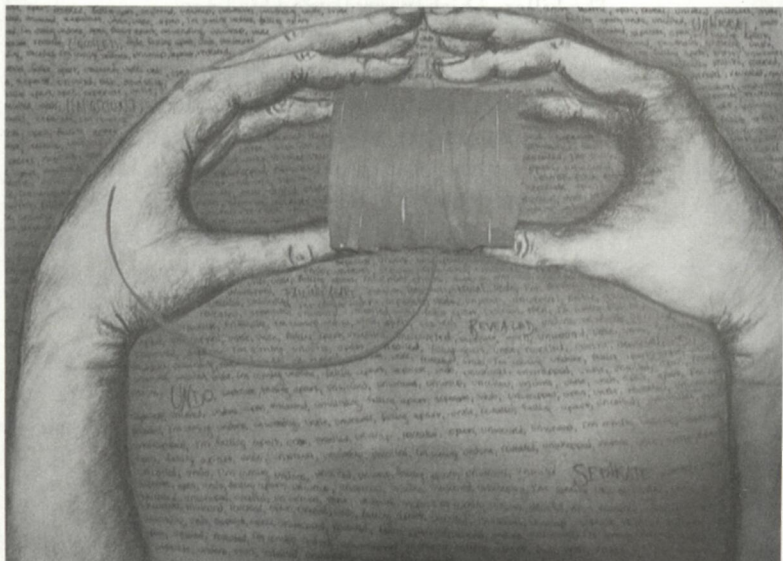
But a few corners anon,
and she was stabbed from behind!

The killer: a bishop, protecting his lines.
She honorably fell at his hand for her sovereign,
and what troops left behind did not cower.

But they were smartly outwitted by a more experienced king,
who sent them running with a powerful swing.
And soon there was nothing more to do but watch their king die;
A laugh of victory was the murderer's cry.
"Next time," he said with a crooked grin,
and held out his hand to confirm the win.

It was firmly shaken,
and the checkered world put away
into the brave box for the next rainy day.

Unravel



JUDGE'S COMMENTS: The artwork that impressed me the most was "Unravel." I feel that this particular work evidenced the very special merits of evocative subject matter, inventive use of media/technique, and presented the viewer with the strong possibility that the whole was indeed greater than the sum total of all the parts.

Business

Mr. Clarence Buffalo scurried about his office, straightening the sign that labeled his desk with his name, throwing a few papers into the wire wastebasket, and vacuuming the floor between the door and the chair in front of his desk. *Oh, the chair!*

"Victor!" he yelled to the man whose office was down the hall. "Hey Victor, we need a new chair in here. This one's burnt."

An unusually tall man wearing a gray business suit poked his bald head into Mr. Buffalo's office and informed him, "We don't have any more that aren't being used."

"Then take whatever Marcellinus is using. Our next applicant will be here any minute."

Victor's response, as all of his words, came in a deep and proper-sounding voice: "And shall I tell him to stand for the next hour?"

"No, no. Tell him something gentler. Tell him he can sit in this charred cushion. Tell him... That's all we can offer him... And that he may stand if he prefers. You figure out how to word it."

"Very well," Victor answered. He took a small number of long steps across the office, picked up the blackened seat, once a brilliant scarlet, and carried it out of the room. Mr. Buffalo followed behind Victor with his vacuum, sweeping up the ashes that fell from the expired office chair. When the carpet was clean and the vacuum put away, Victor returned with a folding chair in hand.

Mr. Buffalo howled, "*That's* what our applicant is supposed to sit in?"

"This is Marcellinus's chair, yes. He's the only one who's going to give up his seat for an hour."

"Then it will have to do. Set it down there and get back to work."

"Very well."

As Victor strode out of the office, Mr. Buffalo's phone trembled and screamed. It was promptly received.

"Hello," Mr. Buffalo answered in distress. "Oh. He's here, is he? Send him right in."

He hung up the phone and breathed a great sigh. From his pocket he withdrew a handkerchief, monogrammed, of course, and wiped the sweat from his forehead and from the black hair just in front of his ears and from his wide mustache, which was red, for some reason. Slowly, he sat in the throne behind his desk. He suspected that he could barely fit between its arms anymore, but he was actually no fatter now than he had been for the past

*"All you need in this life is ignorance and confidence;
then success is sure."*

-- Mark Twain

decade. He closed his eyes and took a few deep breaths as he assumed the composure of a man who had it all together.

"You must be Mr. Buffalo," a rich, friendly voice remarked, snapping him out of his trance.

"I am indeed. And you must be Richard Regent, then," Mr. Buffalo nearly repeated. The young man nodded, and each of his short golden curls bounced in agreement. His rich lips and the shining pearls behind them combined to form a smile that was simply winsome. "Please take a seat."

"It's not much of a chair, is it?" Mr. Regent asked, not quite disgusted.

"No. I'm afraid not. It's here by some rather desperate circumstances, and for that I do apologize."

"I'll not let it bother me, then. It's you who's supposed to be judging me, after all."

"Well said, Mr. Regent. Well said."

The two sat silent for the briefest of moments before Mr. Buffalo leapt into business: "We were impressed with your first interview, Mr. Regent. Obviously, or you wouldn't be here." They laughed a business man's laugh. "I've spoken with a few of your past employers, and they had nothing but good things to say about you. High profits have followed you everywhere you've ever worked-- money trees sprout out of your footprints-- and that's precisely the kind of record we're looking for. But I would like to know what draws you to Synntec."

"I have a couple of answers to that question. Do you want the optimistic one or the cynical one?"

"What's the difference?"

"The cynical answer is the honest one, but the optimistic answer employs some exquisitely-turned phrases."

"That's a promising answer, Mr. Regent. I'll ask for cynical, because this seems like the type of occasion where honesty could actually be a virtue."

"It is refreshing to hear you talk like that, Mr. Buffalo. This is the only company that seems to have any semblance of what's going on in the world. That's the cynical response. You guys know what you're about, and no one else does. Other places confuse social justice or morality or religion or even humanism with business. I'm more to the point, I guess you could say."

"As always, I'm impressed. This does raise the question of your esteem of business ethics?"

"Business ethics. Here's my attitude, and it's honesty you wanted: it's nothing but public relations. People like ethical practices, so a business has to look ethical. In practice, businesses ought to be mostly ethical, because people treat you better when you treat them *fairly*." Mr. Regent waved his hands in the air as he uttered that laughable word. "But businesses exist to make money. That's the whole duty of man, right? So that which impedes this goal should not be put into practice, because that defies the very nature of a business, and to defy the nature of a business is unethical."

"So you have no qualms with, say, lying to protect the interests of this establishment."

"I'd need a more specific situation to answer confidently, but, more often than not, I think that one *ought* to lie to protect the interests of his business."

"Interesting."

"But not unusual. It's what everyone practices. I'm just the only one who's willing to admit it."

"Don't get carried away, Mr. Regent. A good number of us here at Synntec are willing to admit it. We've been at this for a long time. We've figured out a few things."

Mr. Regent once again blessed Mr. Buffalo with his smile.

For the first time in the duration of the interview, Mr. Buffalo shifted his weight in his seat. From his top desk drawer he withdrew Mr. Regent's application. His eyes anchored to it as he spoke: "I did have one last question for you: On your application, you said you were from Hell. Now... was that *the* Hell?"

"Born and raised there, sir."

"Now... at the risk of sounding ignorant, I'd like to ask... Does that make you a demon, then?"

"Yes sir. I'm all demon and proud of it."

"Hmm. Well, I'm not a religious man, so I'll not be one to hold that against you. Synntec is an equal-opportunity employer-- as long as you're qualified for the job, we're tolerant."

"At least you've got that much morality."

"Right. Right... Nothing is official at this point, but I find it very likely that you'll be working with us before the end of the month. The starting salary is thirty-eight thousand dollars."

"Then I'm afraid there's been some miscommunication. I was told seventy thousand to start."

"I see there *has* been a miscommunication. You could easily make seventy thousand this year, but only if you're approved. What we offer for new employees is like a free promotion. You'll be paid retroactively for the whole year if you *are* approved, so you still are likely to make seventy thousand your first year. But it's not a promotion in that it lacks the permanence of a promotion. You must be approved every year if you are to retain that salary."

"I haven't heard anything about this before."

"Victor explained it to you, I'm sure."

"But the health insurance policy doesn't come with any strings, does it?"

"Absolutely not. Just put in a good ten years of work, and it's all yours. Every ten years it increases by three thousand dollars."

"So I have no policy for the first ten years?"

"Right. But it's not really a big issue. Your policies will kick in as you age and you become less healthy and less able to work. The more insurance you need, the more you have. That's the way it works. It's quite sensible."

"Is there anything else about this job you've been keeping from me?"

"Mr. Regent, I assure you, we've not been keeping anything from you. But you *should* remember that your failure to improve sales will result in demerits and suspension of pay."

"I was told that I would be rewarded when I directly improved sales."

"Yes, by not receiving pay docks."

"What?"

"Just consider docked pay to be the norm... ooh... You know, Victor should be the one to explain all of this. He's much better at this than I am."

"No, don't give me Victor. I want to talk to you. What about vacations? What's your policy?"

"Oh, I'm glad you asked. You get thirty vacation days each year. It's really quite nice."

"Thirty? Good. And I can take them whenever?"

"Yes. Well, for the most part. There is one restriction, and that is that you can only take one each month. We also discourage taking vacation days in consecutive months. Should that occur, only the vacation day taken in the first of the two or more months will be paid."

"So I can never use all of my vacation days."

"True, but as a dedicated employee of this company, I don't think you should make a goal out of using every last vacation day."

"This is absolutely ridiculous. I don't know how you've ever managed to hire anyone with these policies!"

"Well, what can I say? There are much bigger fools than you in this world. It's like Barnum said, 'There's a sucker born every minute.'"

"Not in Hell."

With those words, Richard Regent rose from his folding chair, which was now coated in a thin soot film. He marched out of the office, leaving ashes in his footsteps.

Mr. Buffalo sat for about five minutes, putting his mind to work on the situation. Those thoughtful moments ended when Victor's bald head made its appearance in the office doorway.

"Ah," he sighed pleasantly. "The interview is over already. What did you think of Mr. Regent? We're all pulling for him."

Mr. Buffalo sighed. "It's no use. None of our candidates are willing to accept our terms. If we want someone we can push around, we need to get somebody a little more righteous."

"May I ask what difference that will make?"

"If I may theorize just a bit: People are always acting on their fears. People are afraid of you and me, for example. They're terrified of belittlement, of rejection, of failure..."

"But sir, aren't these fears even more exaggerated in demons and in the worst of men?"

"Yes, Victor, of course. But the demons have an *invaluable* fear that everyone else seems to neglect. I believe that those monsters are steadfast and the righteous are not because the demons have a reason to fight for something in this world. After all, it is they who have the fear of God."

Beautiful



ARTIST'S NOTE: This photograph was taken in a Russian street market in Moscow. She's a sweet little girl just trying to get by in her own sweet way.

A King's Gaze



"A leopard does not change his spots, or change his feeling that spots are rather a credit." -- Ivy Compton-Burnett

Louisiana Water Lilies



*"The slender water-lily
Peeps dreamingly out of the lake;
The moon, oppress'd with love's sorrow,
Looks tenderly down for her sake."
-- Heinrich Heine*

The Colour of Ripe

The vase
The soft swell
The woolen overcoat
The Spanish language

I must confess,
I try pretty hard
To like what I do.

One time,
My sister told me the difference
Between a simile and a metaphor,
But I forgot it a couple of times.

The sculptor
The ripening of melons
The subtlety of transition
The finite Spring

Sometimes,
I walk outside and think,
"The sun is/like macaroni and cheese."
But I can't remember what that means.

The easy rhythm
The weighty blues
The dirty laundry
The sentimental man

I don't usually say what I mean,
Much less mean what I say,
But I feel like there isn't much difference
Between simile and metaphor.

"Truth is a fruit which should not be plucked until it is ripe."

-- Voltaire

The understudy
The rules of grammar
The lipstick and razorblade
The tanned corn stalks [before harvest]

I've got to say,
I try really hard,
And I like what I do.

24 Men

Smoke swept plains

And ill fought gains

Abashed

24 men fell

Their's

Another story to tell:

In blood streamed trenches

As mortar shell drenches

Weary of bombarding

They'd give a penny and farthing

To hear a pound

A life-- sound

From their silenced hearts

Drowned

24 men drown

Their sorrow

A gown

Worn deep on their pain

Yet it came

A soft voice like the rain

For every ear heard

Every last word

That true bonny lass

Upon these men did cast

Her tender anthem

Rich and strong

The battle eve's

Passion song:

'Dulce et decorum est, pro patria mori'

24 men rose

No longer chilled

"Dulce et decorum est, pro patria mori
(It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country)."

-- Horace; French idiom of WWI

No longer froze
With mud smeared face
Ne'er one lost his gaze

A fire-flashed dance
Not a thought of second chance
Hell bent on death
Filling lungs like breath
A maiden's song still ringing
Clear
Amid toil and anger
A tear

Escape



*"Wake from your sleep
The drying of your tears
Today we escape, we escape."
-- Radiohead, Exit Music (For a Film)*

For Us, the Living

It has been said
that all of poetry
is about death

and said too
that all of poetry
is about love

But as the first shovelful
of graveyard dirt falls
atop the box which holds
my tiny cousin's shape

I see the look which trembles
in his father's eye as he folds
his arms around my aunt

watching their six-days' son
as he comes to rest
beside a woman who'd died
five thousand times his age

Side to side they sleep
the infant boy nestled
as close as coffins allow
to a grandmother who isn't his

even as his mother's mother
and his father's mother
look on with the rest of us
as the last shovelful of dirt

*"Beauty is ever to the lonely mind a shadow fleeting; she is never plain.
She is a visitor who leaves behind the gift of grief, the souvenir of pain."*

-- Christopher Morley

slips gently across him
tucking him away tightly
with all the other sleepers
packed together head to toe

And as his brother
begins to cry
I come to realize
That all of this
is not for him
but for us

Long tall poems huddled
close in the winter wind
around one of our own

Closing Night

The actors all have given up the ghosts
of their respective roles;
their run completed, they have gone ahead
to other things...

(Somewhere downtown they eat and drink and laugh;
amid bright colors and lights of hotels, bars, and restaurants
remember and forget, fellowship freely,
unbound by
scripted
limits
or characteristic verbosity.)

But still,
the costumes, the clothes of those
who lately lived through actors' energy,
silken shirts, shabby shifts,
shrouds of the souls of roles,
hang level in rows
in the darkened costume room,
dusky and silent, side by side,
cloth like the folds of the stone robe
of a saint in the vault of a church
Shhh.
pale, patched, plain,
gaudy, garish, golden--
in the gray gloom of the sealed room
all obscure
shadows.

"When the curtain falls, the best thing an actor can do is to go away."
-- Harold Macmillan

Readings

We must consider, for example, that the awareness of the infinite interconnectednesses of information made possible by the computer is both literal-- is the sensation of potentiality felt by the user at the terminal-- and figurative. That is, we now-- owing to computers as well as broadcast media-- grasp the world as hypersaturated. Too many channels, too many facts, too many images-- too much that thrusts itself at us. Who does not, now, inhabit a world at once infinite and absolutely incomprehensible? The once narrow aperture defined by place and time, by the cognitive limits of the unassisted senses-- William Blake's "windows"-- has been forced open. Globalness and instantaneity are our new lot. Never mind that we still live, bodily, in one place and still relate ourselves to our environment with our bodily senses; that inhabiting, once the core of our self-conception, our at-homeness in the world, has become schizophrenic. To simple actuality has been added perpetual possibility. Upon the evidence present to immediacy has been superimposed an invisible realm of event-- the ever-present awareness of elsewheres and of the impossibly complex ways in which they impinge on our here and now.

Yet, and here is a terrible paradox, at the very same time that the world is felt to be overwhelming, there is also a poignant sense of its limitation. We have created a sphere of endless news, imagery, and information-- a sort of world within the world-- but the other world, the one that greets our natural senses and imaginations, seems depleted, exhausted. We have eliminated the physical, the geographical, frontiers. There are no more endless tracts or unknown lands to compel the imagination. And what there is of variousness and remoteness is being rapidly stripped of aura and homogenized. Bring the rain forest into the living room enough times and it loses its otherness. Crowd the extremities of earth (what were once the extremities of earth) with Burger Kings and cinemas showing *Die Hard II* and the sense of the possibility begins to vaporize. Is it too obvious to note that the two developments are deeply linked, that the infinity of information has in some ways been purchased at the price of the terrestrial unknown and the sense of mystery it once housed? That the sphere of information takes its exponential growth at the expense of the actual, which nowadays appears to be shrinking, losing force?

From *Readings* (Graywolf Press, 1999, pages 10-13) by Sven Birkerts

*"If it keeps up, man will atrophy
all his limbs but the push-button finger." -- Frank Lloyd Wright*

Touching the Doorknob:

A Conversation with Sven Birkerts about Such Things as the Digital Age, Shrinking Attention Spans, Favorite Books, and the Persistence of the Artistic Imagination

Writer, editor, and seminar director Sven Birkerts gave a keynote address and interacted with students at the English department's Spring 2007 Undergraduate Conference on Literature and Writing, *Making Literature*. In the mid-1990s Birkerts's essays stressed negative effects of the electronic age. Now, the journal *AGNI* that he edits out of Boston University offers an electronic option. Birkerts has recently published a memoir, *My Sky Blue Trades: Growing Up Counter in a Contrary Time*. Friday morning Birkerts sat down with English major Jenny Walton and Taylor University professor Dr. Beulah Baker, surrounded by shelves of books. The following is an edited transcript of their ninety-minute conversation in Baker's office.

Beulah Baker: To start off, I wanted to ask you if your opinions have changed at all since the publication of *Gutenberg Elegies*.

Sven Birkerts: Well, it's interesting because this last summer a year ago I was asked to re-issue the book, but they wanted to do it with a new introduction. I would take the fact that ten years had passed and use it as a kind of platform to rethink what I said in the book and comment on that. And it was a very interesting and tricky piece of writing for me to do because I had been so outspoken the first time around. I mean, the last two words of the book are "refuse it." Ten years later I'm just in the thick of it like everyone else because I've had to be. I started teaching, and teaching lead me into email as did editing, so I have no higher moral ground to stand on to preach or pronounce and yet my views on the subject remain deeply skeptical. I'm just living with more of a sense of self division. It's very hard to be writing something that questions the ultimate implications of connectivity and electronic technology and to be writing that on a piece of electronic technology. It's very circular. It's the serpent biting its tail. The best thing you can do is discover and maintain a critical consciousness of technology so that you use it but are not blind to what it is and the ways that it impinges on your life and who you are.

"The world is but a canvas to the imagination."
-- Henry David Thoreau

BB: What I pick up from your concern about the electronic age, especially with writing, is that we live so much in the fragmented that we don't think with precision, in the rhythm of the sentence, and so forth. So that's the danger. But do you think we are managing to create a culture where people can live in two worlds? I can instant message, but I can also sit in Starbucks and contemplate the sinuosity of a sentence. Is that the answer to the *Gutenberg Elegies*? To live in two worlds?

SB: I think it almost has to be the answer just because we're not going to go back. We're not going to suddenly wake up and collectively say, "Oh my, but it was so much better in 1955! Let's go back." Obviously we're committed to the forward movement of history and the technology that is making it. The optimistic thing is that I really do believe that individuality and the sense of self are not things that are going to be lightly expunged. I believe that the body and the mind and the psyche and the spirit have their own checks and balances, sort of eco-corrective things, and I think that's why we have the danger signals in our culture of all sorts of psychological disorders. A psychological disorder is a way to say that something is out of balance. So now we have this epidemic of all this A.D.D. and A.D.H.D. and all of this hyperactive behavior; they seem so closely correlated with what's going on in the big picture. Or we have the whole multi-billion dollar anti-anxiety industry of serotonin re-uptake inhibitors and all of the drugs because people are feeling extraordinarily anxious.

BB: Yesterday you suggested that the imagination helps a writer connect and put something together and allows the reader to then see that sense of connection. Does it matter what the writer connects to? Could a writer connect with the feeling that we're frantic today, as long as that connection is genuine?

SB: I think of the epigraph to *Howard's End* by Forster. Those famous two words that T.S. Eliot then used to "only connect," and it's intransitive. It doesn't say connect to what, it just says connect. Which to me goes back to the main focus of that talk I gave yesterday which, in a sense, was what I was worrying about most in terms of the world as it's changing. The biggest threat, from one point of view, as far as the writing life is concerned, is that technology seems to be a threat to human attention, to sustained focus and attention-- I guess that's the argument I was trying to make, and it bears directly on the imagination. Imagination can only flourish where there has been and is attention. And we live in an environment which is increasingly fragmented and turned into digital bits and where we get more and more in the habit of distributing ourselves simultaneously in all directions. It's very hard to imagine where strong works of imagination are going to come from. What is going to be the thing that still allows an artist to have an audience? Because in order to connect with anything that's really serious and fairly complex, you have to take it on full-focus, and you have to find that full-focus. And I don't think it's just a switch we can say, "Okay, now I'm going to sit down and read *Ulysses*." It's hard. It takes a long time to get into the sort of mentality that is not distracted and thinking of twenty-five other things.

BB: It seems as if you're referring to Coleridge's secondary imagination.

SB: Coleridge is very much in my thoughts about imagination because I think he made that crucial distinction, which still seems to work, between fancy and imagination. Fancy is kind of the outer layer. It's what you're doing when you're sitting in class looking out the window kind of daydreaming about what you're going to do tonight-- your mind is drifting, you're not using your imagination, you're using fancy. And it's almost an involuntary thing. And I think imagination is a power and a force. It requires a certain amount of responsibility and control. It's a volitional activity. So it's a big difference.

BB: I see that you address a lot how this interferes with the creative imagination. Let me flip it to the educator's point of view. I encounter many more students who are on antidepressants or letting me know they have things interfering with their lives, ultimately things affecting their imagination. If we were to go back to the arts-- for instance, if we immersed ourselves in a Russian novel-- would doing that help bring back the imagination?

SB: Well, that's a really good question. I don't think I could propose literature directly as a counterbalancing corrective, although literature and art in general do offer a counterbalance to the forces that create this sense of intense distractedness and fragmentation. To actually engage a work of art is to be going in the opposite direction of the fragmenting forces of daily living as they come at us. And, in that sense, it is a ground for sort of repossessing something of self-awareness and self-focus because in order to get to that art you have to make yourself hear it and think about it and receive it and then in that process you are sort of voting against that other thing, at least for some time. Obviously, you close the book and the phone rings. So I think we're going to have to find ways to have both in our lives because we're not going to be able to banish those things which are pushing against the unitary self.

BB: So what does this look like for the reader? How does this conflict affect the reading process?

SB: Well, I do believe very much that even though we read mostly silently, the literary experience is significantly auditory in the mental voicing that happens when we read. The writers that give me a feeling of the most direct contact with the imaginative world are able to use language in a certain structure so that the sounds of the sentence almost seem to recreate and enact the thing they're talking about. And to me that was always one of the really baseline pleasures of poetry, which I think I got first without knowing what I was getting. But at some point you realize that not only is poetry very appealing to listen to, but that it works linguistically. There are things happening with the sounds that are creating sensations and pictures in your head. And those are my happiest moments-- when I'm sitting in my Starbucks writing, and I can get into one of those fugue states and have somehow liberated myself enough to fully give myself over to making the kinds of sentences that I like to make. In part, this feeling comes from writing, but in part I think it's the actual pleasure of craft, in the sense that somebody who works with wood can take pleasure in shaving off the piece of wood, and somebody who cooks takes pleasure in the sensations of things coming together in a pot. So also I think a writer takes pleasure

in the something that happens in the middle of a sentence. You think, I'll do a dash here and then two more clauses. Then you suddenly find a verb, and nobody else is going to know you had this pleasure unless they feel it a little when they read.

Jenny Walton: Are there specific books that come to mind when you think of having these sensations? When, as a reader, do you feel the pleasure that the author felt at his craft?

SB: Yeah, in fact, as I'm sitting here rotating slightly side to side, I'm noticing Nabokov there. Nabokov happens to be a writer who with just the touch of a finger can evoke things for me. His memoir *Invitation of a Memory* was enormously influential. And it's a perfect case in point because there are sections in his memoir where he is describing, ten or twelve pages in a stretch, some governess he had when he still lived in Russia as a boy, and what she was like, and how she wore her starch dress or something. On one hand, I couldn't care less about his old governess. And yet, I'm completely there, I'm taking the deepest life pleasure in his dwelling on this. So someone like Nabokov, he can do it. And I'm noticing stories of John Cheever there for instance. I think John Cheever for me hits a different button. He evokes a kind of lyrical dreaminess. F. Scott Fitzgerald can do that for me in different ways. Something in the use of language that you just read a few paragraphs and just the contact with the rhythms, particular dictions of a written language, release something and set you off into a different mental place. James Joyce, I see, D. H. Lawrence. I mean, these are all people that in different ways I've loved. D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* was a book that I kind of inhabited when I was about twenty years old. It seemed to me that nothing was more important on earth than what this writer thought was the nature of love and human relationships. It was all utterly formative, but if I read it today, I would get so impatient with so much of it. I would think it seemed overblown and tedious, but when it hit me, it was exactly right.

BB: Shifting gears a little, tell us how you broke into this world of writing?

SB: I got into this a little bit differently because, though I've ended up writing more essays, I started as a book reviewer. The path there was pretty clear and specific. It was a question of finding and breaking in with a few people who were willing to take a chance with somebody who hadn't published yet and who would at least allow me to submit a book review to see if they liked it. I was living in Boston, and there's an alternative paper called the *Boston Phoenix* that would do two or three books reviews a week. So, I just pitched myself to the editor, and an editor will never say, "Sure, the piece is in," but they'll say something like "Sure, let me see what you can do. And can you get it in by Friday? It should be twelve-hundred words, and try not to do this or that." And I was lucky on that score. I connected well with my first reviewing assignments and pretty soon got familiar with the process. Then, after a few months, they were calling me saying, "Well, we have a couple of new books here. Would you like to take a look?" And that really helped me to get into the world of, not just writing and hearing myself on the page, but also dealing with people who represent the other side, the editorial side of the picture.

BB: Given the fact that there are students at Taylor who are interested in going into writ-

ing but who don't know what that's like, what are some other options? What's it like to be an editor?

SB: I was going to say, as we were starting up, that the compartments are linked but separate parts of my life. I teach undergraduate and MFA writers, and then I edit, and somewhere in there I frantically search for time in which to carry on my own writing. Both finding the time to physically do it and finding the mental airspace that allows for thinking to happen is hard when you have stacks of paper on all sides.

So those are the kinds of areas that I move around and among. I think students might be wondering, I know I wondered and still do, *What is it like once you step out of a university or college writing environment and you want to go into the larger world of writing? What could you expect to do?* I think the thing that people need to realize, and it would seem obvious but it isn't always, is that it takes a long time and that the fact that it takes a long time is not an indication of failure. I think a lot of people come out of college and send off their first few stories to magazines and almost inevitably those stories or poems come back rejected. They send them again, and they come back again. And I think a lot of people at that point say, "Well, I guess I'm just not cut out to be a writer" because in their fantasy their story goes directly to the *New Yorker* and is discovered by the editor-in-chief and immediately published. And I think if you can, you should internalize the idea that it's going to be a very long haul, but that it'll come in stages and that each stage is necessary, and also gratifying.

The first time you break into the small magazines it's very exciting. You enter a world for a while where those are the people you read and follow and keep up with and sometimes you get to know and form correspondences with them. Find a group of magazines or editors and later, depending on what your direction is, you start slowly trading up, trying to get in more exclusive places that pay a little better. I suppose that's step one, and when you come to that ledge, you climb. And then you start thinking eventually about larger publication, getting your things together in some kind of a book form and again the same exact process repeats itself. Very few people pull their material together into a book, send it out and get rewarded immediately with a letter of acceptance or an ecstatic phone call. And I know very good writers, people coming out now from good publishers, whose manuscripts went to twenty-five, thirty places and came back rejected. And you couldn't have told at any point that the manuscript was going to end up happily and successfully published.

BB: Thinking about that practical advice, did you go back and revise your pieces that didn't get accepted? Or did you write new ones, having learned from the earlier attempts?

SB: I think it was more of the second, of learning what was not working. Each time I made a new approach there'd be a slight adjustment. Most editors of magazines don't really have the time to write you extensive letters telling you what you should do with your story. But they often give you a little hint saying we enjoyed this but found it a little bit slow in the second half, or we thought your writing was smart, but you spend far too much time setting scenes. And those little comments become very useful the next time you sit down to write and you hear that voice. And when you're tempted to write that

long scene that you've been wanting, you suddenly catch yourself. So the next time you adjust it, and you do something a little different. And then come all the positive things an editor will say, something like "I love the way you present characters" or "You have a terrific way with dialogue." And then you correct in that direction. And eventually you find something that not only works for them but it works for you.

JW: Yesterday you used an example from Wallace Stevens that portrayed twenty men crossing a single bridge into a single village and how, in actuality, it was like twenty men crossing twenty bridges into twenty different villages. With that in mind, how do you suggest that a writer deal with that sort of subjective approach to his or her work? How do you accept or come to terms with subjectivity, seeing as you can't change or control it?

SB: I think that comes down to what philosophers have always called the problem of other minds. That's the idea that the way I see the world is radically different from the way you see it, and we have no basis for knowing how we differ because all I have are my perceptions and all you have are yours. I guess communication and art are some form of trying to meet in the middle and have this reality-testing or recognition. I think I was talking about this last night, just my own recognition or discovery, for instance, that I couldn't write fiction the way I wanted to and had set out to do. What had drawn me to literature and to writing was, more than anything else, being taken up into these separate worlds of the novels I read growing up. And the first impulse following this great admiration was the desire to do the same thing. I see this in my kids too. You know, they go out and something happens and they like it so much they come home and immediately try to imitate it. So yeah, the idea of becoming a novelist-- I spent so many years of my life throwing myself at that idea. When I think of the hours and hours, I can see them scrolling by in a film of myself sitting there, and I wonder what was that all for? The thing that I discovered was that I have a problem with what's called "negative capability." For whatever reason, I was not one of those people who could make myself into a receptive clean slate in order to imagine or recreate the life of another person. For me, this is sort of the problem of other minds. I didn't have the novelist's gift for assuming that I could imagine other lives.

BB: We were just discussing Emerson's "The Over-Soul" in class recently, and I was trying to explain that Emerson thought that the self of "you" and the self of "me" are in essence the same. Do we believe that anymore?

SB: Well, I think we do share that very basic Emerson perception. However, I don't think from the point of view of a writer that you can just rely on that assumption. I think you can use that as a basis, but I think you need to basically create the terms of connection and understanding. In order to do that you have to use whatever is at your disposal in whatever medium you're in. If you're writing fiction I think that means that you have to use language and style in such a way that not only do you presuppose a human commonality, but you evoke a world so vividly or precisely or comprehensively that the other person reading can draw on their knowledge and find what you've done, that you've actually

made it clear to them, that you've established the ground for connection. It wouldn't be enough for Flaubert just to tell someone quickly what the story of *Madame Bovary* was in order for the artistic understanding to transpire, even if everyone had the same common ground or understanding. He needed to create the conditions of that world to draw us in imaginatively so that we could feel the whole thing unfolding.

BB: So then we're back to the gift of the novelist versus, say, the gift of the critic.

SB: Yeah, and I think for an essayist it is not enough to say, "Well, things are getting complicated, the world is far too digitized and wired-up." You have to use example and analogy, anecdote, argumentation, you have to do all of these things in order to bring your case to the other person, who may emphatically agree or emphatically disagree or be somewhere in between. But you have to sort of recreate the whole experience.

BB: I think that's one of the things I liked when I read your essay. It reminded me of the Romantics, you know, thinking about the function of the imagination: Coleridge, Wallace Stevens (whom you quoted) and William Carlos Williams. And I think I resonate with you because there's still that sense that there's an inner life, and that we need to be in touch with it. Do you think that's typical in today's society? Are some of today's writers still trying to do that? Where are we with the imagination?

SB: Well, in any literary moment, it seems there are certain people who are working in a kind of end-of-the-world, postmodern vein, and there are a number of journals that publish and represent that view. And then I think there are still people among us who are working almost from the middle of the twentieth century-- kind of real traditional, far more traditional than I feel myself to be. And I know these people on many different levels, some of them personally. So, I'll go up to Bennington where I do this MFA teaching. The poet Donald Hall often comes up there, and he's kind of a presence. He'll come in for a few days and talk and read poetry, and he's still very much a part of our world here. He's the Poet Laureate now, but his mind and his sensibility and his imagination are really in a different place. They're not in a postmodern place. He's living in a world of almost nineteenth century continuities. It's kind of a rural imagination, but it's a modern rural imagination. And then I'll sit down and have lunch, and I'll be talking to Rick Moody, or somebody, who's very much representative of this post-Thomas Pynchon, postmodern novel as fluid, invent-yourself-as-you-go-along view. And I'll find I have a great deal in common with him too. With Donald Hall I connect with my old sense of literary varieties; talking to Rick Moody I connect with some sense of living in our moment and the uncertainty and the strangeness of that. And then there are other people who are between the two.

So I feel at any moment it's all going on, but what you do as a writer and as a reader is that you find your niche. I think writers by definition are readers and I think the more you read the more you articulate that which works for you and that which doesn't. And as you clarify your tastes, you clarify yourself to yourself.

JW: In your address yesterday, and today in this interview, you've talked about the "artis-

tic imagination.” I was hoping, before we conclude, that you might be able to clarify your own definition of “artistic imagination.”

SB: Yeah, it's a great question, a very large philosophical question that's probably worth a couple of books. I mean I think about this all the time, so I should be able to formulate some kind of an answer. I know that when I go to writing that succeeds for me and really reminds me why I read and why I love to read, it's because I'm making contact with a certain kind of awareness and that awareness is expressed in many different forms and personalities and literary styles. But the basic thing that I'm going to a book for is a sense of a thinking individual. That's kind of the mystery of existence, I guess. In one way or another it seems to be at the root of art. It's somebody else in the world who is, at some level, just astonished by the sheer fact and possibility of existence. Kind of overwhelmed and then looking to express the strangeness and the interest of that in some form, whether it's a social novel or a piece of reflective meditation or a work of poetry. And I think those are the things that I have to make contact with in order to remind myself of what I'm doing and why I'm doing it with writing. I have to have a moment where I look up and sort of see the world and realize that nobody in a sense knows anything. There's an amazing sort of complicated life going on around us that's very dense and interesting. That it's just there to be looked at, studied, thought about, responded to. And, at some level, I'm always checking in with that feeling, and it seems then to feed that obscure thing called the imagination. When I think about things I want to write, I usually make a very quick check with that feeling-- it's a “run back and touch the doorknob” kind of thing.

JUDGES' BIOGRAPHIES

ART JUDGE

JOHN P. GEE is an Associate Professor of Art at Ball State University. He received his B. F. A. from Herron School of Art and his MFA from southern Illinois University at Carbondale. John has taught studio classes at Ball State since 1972. His primary area of expertise is drawing and he teaches introductory through advanced classes. He has exhibited his drawing in over 200 shows and his work is represented in a number of permanent collections.

PROSE JUDGE

BILL GREEN (2004) has served *Parnassus* as a staff member, editor, contributor, and now judge. His own work consists of short fiction. He teaches writing in Chicago, where he resides.

POETRY JUDGE

DR. JOSEPH HEITHAUS teaches at DePauw University, where he is currently chair of the English Department. His poems have appeared in many journals including *The North American Review*, *The Southern Review*, *The New England Review*, and *Poetry*. He won the 2007 "Discovery"/The Nation Prize, and he recently won a contest run by the Writers' Center of Indiana; his poem, "Indiana Flight," will be on permanent display in a large stained glass window commissioned for the new Indianapolis International Airport opening in 2008.

"There is nothing so amiable as discernment."

-- Lord Byron

AUTHORS' & ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

SARAH ALBINSON (2011) is a Social Work major and a Studio Art minor. She grew up in Vienna, Austria, as a missionary kid, and can therefore speak German fluently. She loves to draw, paint, take pictures, make music, engage in people's lives, travel, watch movies, and eat ethnic foods.

EPRISE ARMSTRONG (2008) is a senior transfer student majoring in Psychology. She enjoys green, eBay, and dreaming of Greece.

JOHN BAHLER (2008) is an English Writing major. He is capable of the following: speaking, singing, guitar spielen, and walking. He has never done anything interesting with his life, but one day he hopes to.

BEULAH BAKER is a professor in the English department at Taylor. She has made a career out of words, from reading cereal boxes on the breakfast table, to editing high school and undergraduate newspapers, to writing her dissertation on William Carlos Williams. She delights in those Taylor students who have rewarded her teaching by honing their thoughts through verbal expression.

ALLISON BARLOW (2009) is an English Education major who enjoys reading, traveling, and taking life slowly.

SETH BARNES (2007) graduated as a Business Management major. He is currently traveling around the world on the World Race. He enjoys writing, lounging about, talking and joking, most sports, strategy games, traveling, music, reading, and critiquing many of these.

CATHERINE BARNETT (2009) is an English Education major. She loves trees, gardens, books, laughter, and deep conversations over hot drinks.

KYLE BOASE (2009) is a Psychology major. He enjoys traveling, coffee, music, and diners.

HANNAH BOTTRELL (2009) is an International Studies major from Australia and Papua New Guinea.

"All art is autobiographical; the pearl is the oyster's autobiography."
-- Federico Fellini

ZAN BOZZO (2007) was a Philosophy major who is currently pursuing graduate studies in the same field. His interests include traveling, writing, movies, and reading anything that he can get his hands on.

LINDSEY BUCHANAN (2010) is a Studio Art major. Her favorite things are sailing, gypsy trinkets, and ghost towns.

ALLIE BURBRINK (2007) is an Education major. She is thankful that her apartment south of Indianapolis is equipped with a dishwasher. She teaches seventh grade Language Arts and enjoys making music, running, reading, Goodwill shopping, and thinking of new ways to make learning fun.

MAGGIE BURNS (2011) has not yet declared a major. She loves to express her heart for missions through the photographs she takes while abroad. Maggie is on the softball team here at Taylor and enjoys the company of friends over a warm cup of Starbucks coffee.

RACHEL BROWN (2010) is an International Studies major from Nairobi, Kenya. She loves her family, spending time with friends, traveling around the world, the Indian Ocean, sunny days, and trying new things.

KELLI CONNERS (2010) is an English major. She is on the Taylor Equestrian Team and likes to read good books in interesting places while eating chocolate chip cookies.

JACOB CRAMER (2009) is a Social Studies Education major.

RACHAEL CUSACK (2007) graduated as an English major. She is comfortably settling into the life of a working girl in Boston. She works at a flower shop outside the city and has yet to discover how to write well in the margins of her time.

NATHANAEL DAVIS (2009) is an MES graduate candidate in Taylor University's Environmental Studies program. He loves to read, journal, and explore the wild outdoors while hiking and camping.

REBEKAH DeGREEFF graduated from Taylor in 2007.

DREW DEMAREST (2009) is majoring in English Writing with a minor in Philosophy. He enjoys reading, writing, drawing, painting, and acting. He was born and raised in Racine, Wisconsin, a town that is constantly trying to return to its heyday, yet a place that he calls home because of family, friends, and familiarity.

ELIZA DHONAU (2009) is a Media Communication major. She is a fan of the short, vague bio. Really, she hopes the elusiveness will make her seem more interesting than she is.

PETER DULL (2007) graduated with an English major. He was on the phone for fifteen minutes with his mother while doing dishes and trying to explain how she could search for and email his writing to him from an external hard drive. His neck felt stiff afterwards. He lives in Maryland and works in Washington, D.C.

KIM DUNCAN (2008) is an International Studies major. She is a daughter, a sister, a future wife, and a friend.

STEVE ETHERIDGE (2010) is an English Writing major, but he claims to be a Science major with a concentration in geriatrics. Amongst other things, he is interested in staying regular, rice cakes, driving slowly, hard candies, and not getting cataracts.

BRIAN FANNIN (2011) is a Media Communications major.

AUDREY FELGER (2008) is a Studio Art major with concentrations in printmaking, painting, and drawing. She likes coffee, ink, and good music, as well as spending long hours creating beautiful things.

ERIN FITZGERALD is a compulsive traveler. She will graduate May 2008 but has yet to decide what to do with her life. If you have any suggestions for lines of work to begin or countries to visit, please let her know.

ANDREW GOEDICKE (2010) is an Art Education major. He loves to spend his time with friends as well as spending time doing handstands. He finds much of his inspiration for art from the Cirque du Soleil and from nature.

ALYSSA GUEBERT (2010) is an English Writing and Communication Studies double major. She loves strong coffee, a good book, and close friends.

LUKE HARTY (2009) is a Social Work major from the great state of Indiana. He loves Taylor U as much as the next guy, but has a special place in his heart for Cherry Coke™ Polar Pops™ and The Brotherhood [of believers].

AMYE HARVEY (2008) is a Business Management major. Her favorite pastime includes sipping hot green tea in her favorite pearl necklace as she plots ways to avoid growing up. So far, she has been incredibly unsuccessful.

ERIK HATCHER (2009) is a Developmental Economics major. He loves the theatre and wants to do as much good for the world as possible.

CHRIS HOSKINS (2007) majored in English and minored in Philosophy. He reads, he writes, he treasures warm things on cold days.

STEPHEN KUHN (2010) is a Music Education major. He loves to sing, play the piano

and organ, and paint. He loves to paint in oil and watercolors, as well as china painting.

SHAWNA LANE (2010) is a Social Work major. She loves people. It is her continuing goal to remember that everyone she comes into contact with has something to offer: something they can teach her. She loves sports, drinking coffee, reading, and snowboarding.

ANDREW MARSTON (2009) is a ruggedly handsome Photography and Graphic Design major hailing from picturesque coastal Maine. Andrew runs track, eats big breakfasts, and has a soft spot for Zelda and animated features. Visit <http://www.AndrewMarston.com> for more of Andrew's works.

JESSICA MARTINI (2010) is majoring in English Writing and Spanish, for now. She loves nature, art, people, and stories.

JESSICA McLEAN (2011) is a Communications New Media Writing major with a Minor in English (Writing) from Detroit, Michigan. She loves stories, skiing, traveling, and playing with her cat, Shadow. She also loves God and hopes to serve Him one day by getting a job writing for a major newspaper.

LAURA McGRATH (2009) is a History major. She hopes to never grow up, but wants to spend a considerable amount of time traveling the world and having an adventure.

ANDREW NEEL (2009) is a Media Communications/Systems major with a Media Writing emphasis. He plans to travel to Amarillo, Texas, and attempt to eat the legendary 72 oz. steak in one sitting. All other future plans are up in the air.

AMY NICKERSON (2010) is a Professional Writing major at Taylor's Ft. Wayne campus. When she's not studying you can find her traveling, dreaming about traveling, or writing about traveling. She is in love with Europe and is proud to be a Canadian.

KAYE PATTON (2008) is a Studio Art major with a Graphic Design minor. She travelled afar from South Korea and had resided in Champaign, Illinois, for six years before coming to Taylor.

KEVIN PEIFER (2008) is an English/Systems major with a Writing emphasis. He loves medieval history, mythology, and Tolkien-like fantasy fiction.

VALERIE PRESCOTT (2010) is a Biblical Literature major. She loves spending time with friends, reading good books, exploring art museums, and traveling.

MATTHEW REICHERT (2008) is a Chemistry/Biochemistry major who calls Montana his home. When he's not working in a lab or doing other homework, he enjoys walks in the dark, hiking, and taking pictures of those little details of nature one may miss. He

wishes he could travel the world and photograph it, but he has to treasure those surroundings that are Indiana.

JENNELL RICHARDSON (2009) is a Studio Art major. She loves to attend Knitting Club every Saturday at 1, listen to The Decemberists on vinyl and live in alternate realities. She occasionally reads "The Yellow Wallpaper" over and over until she starts creeping around her room.

JOE RICKE is a professor in the English department at Taylor. His favorite color is blue. He sings the blues, plays bluegrass, and occasionally has a blue day. On those days, he likes to take long walks and compose poetry by recitation, like Wordsworth. Coleridge did too, but he used opium. That's cheating.

HEATHER SCHULTZ (2008) is a Professional Writing major at Taylor University Ft. Wayne. She loves a good book, writing, traveling, and gaining new experiences. She hopes to one day publish her own novel.

BRAD SEEMAN is a professor in the Philosophy department at Taylor. He enjoys writing, but usually he is scribbling essays in philosophy. This is his first poem since high school to see the light of day. Once he completes his dissertation, he hopes to explore more opportunities for writing poetry and perhaps a children's book. Brad, Kiersten, and their five children recently moved to Upland so Brad could teach philosophy at Taylor.

JENNY SHAFFER (2008) is an English Writing major with a New Media minor. She once knew how to fly, but then she grew up and lost the ability. Now she resorts to reading, writing, and traveling to regain some of that freedom she once knew.

DANIELLE SPEAR (2011) is a Psychology major. She especially enjoys taking pictures while traveling. She loves to spend time with her family (including her eight siblings) and also with her friends. She loves music and hopes to one day learn to play the guitar.

CAITLIN STAPLES (2008) is a Psychology major. Myers-Briggs labels her as an ENFP. Her latest exciting pursuit is planning a way to travel the world, love people, and somehow get paid for it.

LAUREN STEIGERWALD (2009) is a Professional Writing major. In her free time, Lauren enjoys long walks with her fiance or a hot cup of tea, sometimes at the same time!

MEGAN VILLAIRE (2009) is an Art Education major. She loves Italian culture, traveling, building relationships, and art. She tries to convey God's compassion in all her endeavors. Megan hopes to travel the world and share her passion for art with children.

JENNY WALTON (2009) is an English Writing major who is learning to be okay with running late and eating mushrooms.

COLLEEN WARREN is a professor in the English department at Taylor. She has four children and spends her free time running and reading (though not simultaneously), as well as writing in her Thoreauan writing cabin that is located in the woods on the Warren acreage.

MARK WILLIAMSON (2009) is a Graphic Design major from Sugar Land, Texas. Mark loves design, photography, and movies.

Drawing its name from the Grecian mountain said to house the nine Muses, *Parnassus* is the literary and art journal of Taylor University. It accepts submissions of all types of creative work, including but not limited to art, prose, and poetry. The submission deadline is held in the fall of each year and the journal is released in early spring. Members of the Taylor community are encouraged to submit work for publication. Contact the Taylor University English department for more details.

Some of the pieces within these pages are interpretations of other artists' or authors' work. Please note that the lithograph "Virginia" (pg. 68) is based on George Beresford's piece "Virginia Stephen", the oil painting "Princess Albert de Broglie" (pg. 107) is a detail of Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres's work of the same name, and the drawing "Montoya" (pg. 67) is copied after a photograph of the same name printed in *National Geographic* some years ago. Finally, the poem "Canto of Pride" (pg. 57) borrows from Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* and other works. Please look for the notes after the poem for full credits.

"The immature artist imitates. Mature artists steal."

-- T.S. Eliot

END NOTES

This year's cover was designed by staff member Jenny Shaffer. Titled "Five Smoke Signals," the piece is a composite of five different photographs of smoke columns.

Van Gogh once compared a person's inner thoughts to wisps of smoke that only hint at the "great fire in our soul" (read the full quote below). In part, the purpose of *Parnassus* is to provide a forum for such "inner thoughts" of the Taylor community. Though not all of the pieces included in the preceding pages offer profoundly personal insights (it's good to keep in mind, for instance, that the speaker of a poem isn't necessarily the author), all of these pieces, as works of creation, are reflections on their creators.

Perhaps, as you browse through these pages, you'll pause to catch the wisp of an image or idea. Better yet, perhaps you'll choose to linger by the fire of an author or artist's work, reading a beautiful poem aloud, treating an artwork to more than a cursory glance, or savoring a well-phrased line of prose. As a staff, it is our hope that those who glance through *Parnassus*'s pages will discover a little more about those whose work is presented here, and through that experience, discover a bit more about themselves.

*"Do our inner thoughts ever show outwardly?
There may be a great fire in our soul, yet no one ever comes to warm
himself at it, and the passers-by see only a wisp of smoke
coming through the chimney, and go along their way."
-- Vincent van Gogh*

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"Creativity takes courage."
-- Henri Matisse

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ZAN BOZZO
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REBEKAH DeGREEFF
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JENNY WALTON
COLLEEN WARREN

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